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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 373. FOR WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 22ND, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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No. 8

Feb. 22, 1896.

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SHORT STORIES

No. 373.] [ONE PENNY.

EDITED BY

C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

For the Week ending February 22nd, 1896.

The Ballad of Jane Stilich.

From the Montenegrin. By A. T.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin, and where the outlying countries stretch away to the gleaming blue sea, there also are hearts to whom vengeance is sweet!

Dragho! Dragho Stilich! where is he now? He who was blest with wife, and child, and wealth; whose flocks of sheep with twisted horns roamed the vales of Montenegro. And where, too, is Arnold Mienesky, for whom, in vast plantations, the plum trees were bearing fruit to enrich his coffers, and whose white mulberries were thick in foliage? Listen! It is a casino at Xalassi-Mali, and Dragho and Arnold are quarrelling hotly. Word leads to word, and rage mounts high in both their breasts. Ah, hold your breath! What deed is this? Arnold draws his dagger, and Dragho, smitten, falls to the earth murmuring "Vengeance."

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

And now who is this who comes weeping, to claim the dead? Jane—Jane Stilich, the widow. And the neighbours lift the body in their arms and carry him where the fire is smouldering upon his own hearth, and lay him on the mat, where the dying flames send a strange glow upon the pallid cheek and light up his wide-open eyes. What is the meaning of that significant gaze from those staring eyes? The priest, who comes with holy water to bless the dead, is strangely troubled. Only Jane Stilich understands, and when they have placed beside him his weapons and his pipe she goes forth to seek the Sardar. The hour-glass marks four o'clock.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

Behold, it is the widow who enters the house of the Sardar. She speaks: "Hear me, oh friend! My son is young. An ear of corn is the heaviest sword his little hand can hold, and I have no brothers. You are rich in brothers, and four sons who bear your name are of an age to carry arms. You were Dragho's friend, punish his murderer," and Jane fell upon her knees at the Sardar's feet. He fixes his gaze upon her and replies:

"But look you, Dragho Stilich has been no more my friend since last year's Christmas feast was held, when, rich in flocks, he refused to give me four sheepskins to clothe my four brave sons. But you—you are fair and comely—my sons and I will search the country for the murderer, and then you shall give yourself as wife to the Sardar." Jane's eyes blaze with fury, and she departs. All night long Jane is weeping over the body of her lost husband, and Dragho gazes steadfastly before him with ever open eyes.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

The skies are bright with another day. Far and near hurries the tortured widow. Among the friends of Dragho she looks in vain for one who will arm himself and seek the fugitive. With one accord they answer: "Ah, but Arnold, too, has always been our good friend." And then, with despair in her soul, Jane turns her steps towards the house of the Sardar. "It is well—I accept the compact."

The eyes of the old Sardar flash beneath their hoary brows. And Jane, once more is she alone in her widowed home; once more she weeps over her dead; then, bending low, she whispers in his ear, and lo! the

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open eyes close in quiet rest and Jane weeps on, and the hour-glass marks four o'clock.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

"Awake—hasten, my sons—let us prepare powder and ball and rations for the days we shall wander far from our home. Where are the hunting knives? Tighten your belts that the gurrine may closely protect your chests, bring forth the deerskin robes, that the dews and showers of night may not destroy our arms and our stores. Arnold Mienesky has flown to the mountain heights, and we go to take his life, for is it not he who has killed Dragho, our dearest friend?"

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

Skilful is he and wary—the old Sardar, and soon the fugitive shall feel the danger that is near him. The Sardar discovers his tracks, and on the first day they meet, one of the four brave sons falls dead, and when the second day breaks, behold another son is slain. The Sardar hesitates, and questions his course. Arnold, the murderer, bethinks him if it would not be well to surrender. The priest seeks the widow and urges reconciliation. With fury and passionate words she refuses, and as she speaks, the sand falls and the glass marks four o'clock.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

"She refuses in wrath," is whispered through the streets of Xalassi-Mali—but the people, still hoping, send to the Lord Bishop a hundred sequins—the price of a head. With the Lord Bishop rests the charge of calling a tribunal of reconcilation. In the great church all is prepared for the mass of peace. Ring out, O bells, for the blessed mass of reconciliation, and ring for the twelve young mothers who come, carrying their babes in their arms, to knock at the widow's door. "Jane, Jane, open the door to us—we bring gold and 'broidered kerchiefs," but no response comes from the close fastened door.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

"Jane, our good neighbour Jane, in the name of our children we ask for forgiveness. Arnold repents. It was but a dispute. Malice there was none. It was the dagger which slew Dragho. The dagger alone is guilty—only listen, the priest will come to shatter it and pronounce it accursed. Open the door, Jane, open to us." But Jane Stilich is silent and relentless. She has sworn an oath to her dead, and woe befal him who breaks his oath.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

Dragho's murderer wanders once more through the forest's depths. This time, supported by his two brothers and by the two sons whom death has not stolen away, the aged Sardar again essays the capture. Fear seizes upon Arnold; to fly or to search a place of hiding, in both lurks danger. Enveloped by the dark shades of night, wild beasts beset his way, and his breast is filled with terror—his days are days of hurrying, fearful flight from his memories. The aged Sardar sounds a note of triumph! Arnold abandons his defence. He surrenders—he is the Sardar's captive. And the vision arises before the Sardar of Jane—the fair widow waiting for him in her lonely home. And now behold the victorious procession that enters Xalassi-Mali. Men, women, and the children in the streets, follow in the train of the Sardar and his two brave sons, the prisoner Arnold Mienesky in their midst.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

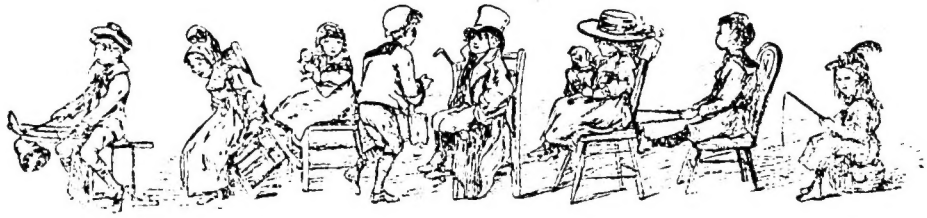
From afar the drone of the pipes and the noise of many feet reaches Jane, and sends a thrill to her heart as she reads in the din the announcement that the Sardar has returned. No time for thought. She opens her coffers and takes out the rich marriage robe which has lain untouched since the joyful day that saw her Dragho's bride. Its folds shake out the scents of lavender and asperule. How beautiful she is in this bright garb. Her fingers sparkle with gems, and jewels shine in her ears; on her head-dress rings together a double row of Turkish sequins. In one hand she holds her distaff, in the other her household keys. "He has avenged Dragho to possess Dragho's wife and Dragho's flocks. It is well. I am his."

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin.

"Make way, make way for the procession!" The heralds proclaim the Sardar's approach. His brothers and his sons still follow him. Jane, happy Jane, climbs to the roof of her house to bid them welcome. The old Sardar thinks upon her charms; his wrinkled visage is full of ardour. He hastens to open the door which alone separates him from the woman he longs to possess. As he knocks a voice from above falls in clearest tone upon his ears. "Behold your bride!" He turns quickly, eagerly, with anxious longing, and Jane flings herself from the lofty roof as the echoes repeat to the affrighted Sardar: "Behold your bride!" Where is now the spirit of Jane, Jane Stilich, as she lies dead, dead before the Sardar and his followers?

And the glass marks four o'clock, and the Sardar has not Jane Stilich, nor has he Dragho's flocks of sheep with twisted horns which roam the vales of Montenegro.

Sweet is vengeance to the heart of a Montenegrin, and where the outlying countries stretch away to the gleaming blue sea, there also are hearts to whom vengeance is sweet.



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The Startling Legend of The Weathercock.

Adapted from the French by Edward Vizetelly.

The little town of Saint-Vrain-sur-Mesle is rightly proud of its church, which is quite a marvel of Gothic architecture, erected by the Prémontrés monks, who founded their first monastery there, and for many years devoted half their immense revenue to building the sacred edifice.

The order at that time was in all the splendour of its power, and the monks, to mark their pious enthusiasm and enhance the glory of Saint Augustin, their patron, determined that the spire of their church should surpass that of any other in Burgundy.

The steeple, which is beautifully sculptured, as indeed is the whole of the monument, towers up three hundred feet above the ground, and at that altitude, from a terrace surrounded by a forged iron balustrade, an octagonal spire with prominent knobs of stone running along each arris extends into the air another hundred feet and is terminated by a flowery cross.

The architects of the building seem to have thought this spire would never require to be touched, for they made no provision for ascending it, and it so happened that one day when lightning struck the superb weathercock which in those times darted backward and forward in the wind, above the cross, and sent it flying to pieces, the priests were in great perplexity as to how to have it replaced.

This was all the more vexatious as the congregation who were for the most part exceedingly superstitious, saw an ill-omen for the church, town, and crops in the accident, and to increase the trouble, someone all at once discovered that the remnants of the zinc bird, still remaining on high, seen from the threshold of the parsonage, had all the aspect of a silhouette of the Devil.

It was then recalled that during the building of the church the Grand Prior Pancrace, according to the legend, was one day at prayer, when his thoughts having wandered to the magnificence of his work, the Evil One cast a feeling of pride into his heart. The saintly man whilst at once rapidly performing an act of penance, had quietly taken his chaplet from his belt, thrown it over Satan's head, and after dragging him several times round his cell, sprinkling him with holy water, had condemned him to keep the building in perfect repair from the foundations to the cross; but naught had been said anent the weathercock, and it was now averred that the Prince of Darkness was avenging himself on this poor zinc fowl!

In order to allay the anxiety of the inhabitants and put an end to all this silly superstitious talk, it became absolutely necessary that something should be done. The priests, therefore, put their heads together, and having studied the documents relating to the building of the church and ascertained the exact proportions of the weathercock, ordered a brand-new one from Paris; and when one Sunday morning the announcement was at length made from the pulpit that the damage was about to be repaired, the satisfaction was general.

A fortnight afterwards the cock, very carefully packed, was delivered at the vicarage, and being removed from its case was exhibited to the public gaze, when it very soon became an object of admiration to the curious and devout.

The bird's arrival, however, was marked by several small misfortunes. His comb, cut into little sharp teeth, tore the lips of a babe who had leaned from its mother's arms to kiss his head; his beak scratched the forehead of a girl who had been pushed against it by some rough boys endeavouring to approach nearer the object of general attention; the point of his tail made a great rent in the vicar's cassock, and his reverence remarked to one of his curates, that he should not be at all sorry when the bird was definitely fixed in position.

But that was just the question. Who was to place it there? Inquiries had been made, but no one sufficiently venturesome, steeplejack or other, had as yet presented himself to perform the task.

At last, however, a slater came forward and announced himself ready and willing to do the job. Cap in hand, he stood listening with deference to the vicar's instruction, nodding his head as the explanation proceeded, and calculating in a thoughtful business-like manner the difficulty and expense of the work. Stroking his chin with his hand, he fixed the amount: so much for a pole, so much for rope, so much for hooks and rings, so much for labour.

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The bargain was struck, and the workman, wishing the priest good-day, was about to cross the threshold when the latter, calling him back, inquired with some concern, whether he were quite sure of his strength and courage, if he were not afraid of giddiness, whether he had calculated and considered all the danger of the undertaking?

The man stared at the vicar surprised, rolling back his sleeve he exhibited his muscular arm, slapped his huge thigh, expanded his chest, drew himself up erect like a Titan ready to scale the heavens. Then he went his way.

* * * * *

At last the great day came.

It was a couple of hours after sunrise. Refreshed by sound sleep, invigorated by a hearty meal, the brave slater ascended the steps of the steeple, followed by two assistants carrying the cock, pole and cordage to the terrace.

All the population of Saint Vrain, reinforced by contingents from neighbouring parishes, are out of doors and swaying to and fro at the foot of the steeple. Gendarmes in full uniform move among them, preserving order and keeping an open space round the tower in case something might fall from the top. Within the church a few compassionate and anxious old women are burning candles and praying for the unknown man who is risking his life up above. The vicar is thumbing the pages of his breviary, all in a tremble, in the vestry, daring neither to go outside and see for himself what is transpiring, nor to ask anyone for news.

All at once a sort of dull prolonged yell bursts from the crowd assembled in the streets and squares.

The man has appeared on the terrace!

Only half his body has as yet issued from the door. He is pulling something up behind him. Presently he is seen unrolling cords and rope which he places in separate lots at the edge of the parapet. He is next perceived placing a pole taller than himself at the base of the spire; finally the cock appears. He seems to roll it up in something and then lays it down on the terrace.

He is at the base of the spire.

He walks round it on a narrow ledge, encircling it with a rope ending in a slip-knot. In this rope are passed two others which dangle downward and are finally attached to the cock and pole respectively.

Now he's off!

He passes the thick rope round his loins, tightens the running knot until it brings him near the spire, then making an effort with his hands and knees he advances sideways, rising slightly at each movement and thus tracing the initial curve in a spiral which takes him to the foremost projecting stone. There he fixes a hook fastened to his chest by a short leather thong, and with his two hands now free, undoes the slip-knot, tightens the thick rope and recommences his turning, ascending movement to the second prominent piece of masonry.

Forty times in the course of an hour, which seemed an age, the terrified spectators, holding their breath, watch him appear and disappear in turn, proceeding higher and higher, quicker and quicker, in proportion as the diameter of the spire decreases until his head is on a level with the small circular platform supporting the cross. He is then seen to twirl his legs round the spire, which at that point is quite small, and again tightening the thick rope girdle, wipes his forehead with his cuff, and remains motionless, his head bent slightly forward as if recovering breath. Then he takes a flask from his pocket and has a pull at it.

That flask contained brandy, and it has always been a matter of discussion among the wiseacres of Saint-Vrain, as to whether on that occasion the bold slater took too little or too much.

From the height he has now attained, he is able to touch the bottom of the cross without an effort. After a few moments' rest he is seen passing his arms round the four iron bars by which it is kept in position. He has encircled it two or three times with the rope and, having caught this with the hook fastened to his chest, has clutched hold of two of the iron bars, let go the spire with his legs, and, straining with his arms, has hoisted himself up into a kneeling position on the platform.

Then measuring the height of the cross with the eye, he notices with satisfaction that it is barely ten feet. As the pole is twelve feet long, he sees he will only have to hook it on once, which will shorten and simplify the last part of the ascent considerably.

He stands erect, passes the rope once round the perpendicular part of the cross, fixes the hook at his chest into it, seizes one of the two small cords hanging attached to the thick coil, and draws up to him the pole which until then had been lying at the base of the spire.

This pole, armed at the end with a three pronged claw, is encircled from distance to distance with rolls of leather, interlaced with wire, which stand out very prominently from it. The man hooks the claw on the flower at the top of the cross, and in a few minutes, thanks to his chest-hook and the slater's stirrups fastened to his knees, climbs up the pole as up a knotted cord, but with this advantage that the former being inflexible and firmly fixed by the broad claw, does not sway about, and at last he finds himself seated on the flower with his chest against the pivot of the weathercock which extends barely a couple of feet above his head. He fastens himself firmly to this rod, and by the aid of the second cord draws up the cock.

When the multitude below perceived this human figure rise into the air, more daring than the daring edifice he towered over, they broke into a wild roar of applause which ascended with terrible harmony to the unfortunate wretch who had aroused it.

That was his death warrant.

Up to that fatal moment, the idea had never entered that humble heart and narrow mind, that in the eyes of the world there could be any difference between him and the bird that flies by on the wing, or the blade of grass that is trampled under foot. And even now, a few minutes ago, amidst the terrible undertaking he was about to crown, not one of his iron nerves had quivered, not a thrill had passed through any of his fibres; he had reflected neither on the danger he was exposing himself to, nor on his courage. He had said to himself that it was hard work, that was all. His thoughts had not gone further.

But at this spontaneous explosion from all those souls beneath him, his eyes which until then had never once caught a glimpse of the radiant magnificence of glory, his ears which had never heard the formidable thunder of acclamation, both opened amidst dazzling splendour, and he was seized with a sort of frenzy.

From the height at which he stood he embraced the heavens, towered above the earth, and the thousands of human beings who were gesticulating and shouting at his feet seemed smaller to him than ants. He who had never known but the wretched side of humanity, suddenly understood its greatness and felt imbued with all its majesty!

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The multitude saw him stoop down, seat himself on the flower, take the weathercock on his knees, remove the cloth in which he had wrapped it to save it from injury in the transit; then, holding the bird in one hand, and assisting himself with the pivot which he grasped with the other, he stood erect. Stooping slightly again, he raised the remains of the old cock with his shoulder and sent them bounding down the spire on to the roof of the nave with a great clatter. Then taking the cock by the tail, he placed it on the pivot waiting to receive it. He bent down once more, set it in motion, and another shout from the crowd greeted the first turn of the new acquisition.

The unlucky fellow had now only to descend. By sliding on to the branches of the cross first of all, then down the pole, he would find at the top of the spire the cords which had assisted him in hoisting up pole and cock. He would then only have to twist the rope once round each leg, and let himself slowly descend, with his back comfortably leaning against the roof of the spire. In three minutes at the most he would reach the terrace.

But that shout, that shout of triumph, uttered by the swerving multitude below, had wrested from him the little reason he still retained.

An uncontrollable burst of pride, as vulgar as himself, as frightful as the courage he had been displaying, put into his head the mad idea of surpassing all he had till then achieved by a more startling act of daring still.

He bestrode the weathercock, and by a powerful movement of the loins set it in motion.

At the sight of this fearful folly, the crowd stood there silent, motionless, holding their breath, and with parted lips and straining eyes watched the bird whirl round and round.

One minute, two minutes, three, four, five minutes passed.

The cock was still turning!

The man who, first of all had bowed with his cap, was now bending forward straining the cock's neck with his arms. He sought to pass one of his legs over the bird's tail; but whether it was that he had already lost his presence of mind or that the obstacle was too high, he was unable to do so. He also tried, by stretching his leg, to attain the flower at the summit of the cross, but he waved it about in space in vain. In bestriding the cock he had probably taken a spring, for his feet were dangling in the air. The people saw him cross and lock them together under the bird's stomach.

Then the man drew himself up, opened his arms, and stretched them out on either side of him with a gesture of supreme pride.

He remained so.

And the cock continued whirling round and round.

As this frightful scene became prolonged the crowd began to stir. Persons looked at one another, nudged each other, not yet daring to speak. Some of the women began to cross themselves, others to faint. At last a piercing shriek was heard. A young girl had fallen backward in hysterics. At the same instant, as if by the effect of a shock from a current of electricity, several other women fell down, victims to the same sort of attack; children yelled and a great many persons began running about in bewilderment, crying out unaware of what they did or what they said.

This had been the order of things for at least a quarter of an hour. The cock at last had stopped, but it was perceived with horror, that the man was still motionless on its back with legs crossed and extended arms.

Someone suggested that the vicar, who was still in the vestry awaiting the end of the job, ought to be informed of the strange turn affairs had taken and this was done.

When the worthy man came out on to the square to look for himself he at first sought to reassure those who spoke to him, but his heart, nevertheless, was beating very fast. Not having been present at the whole scene, he was not so much affected as the spectators.

The man was seated so thoroughly upright, his gesture so neat and firm that the fact of his remaining so long in the same attitude could be naught else than bravado pushed to the extreme. It was in that sense the vicar spoke to those about him, but whilst doing so he felt horrified at heart, and he hurried off a messenger to the doctor to request his presence and his telescope.

Shortly afterwards the telescope on its tripod stood pointing towards the weathercock, and the doctor placing his eye to it to adjust the sight, bounded backward with an exclamation.

At that cry the vicar rushed forward, and in his turn looked.

In the black circle of the objective, standing out against the clear background of the sky, he saw the slater stiff, and motionless as a statue. His face was green, daubed with two blackish spots on the cheeks and contracted by a frightful rictus displaying his tongue hanging down between his teeth, which were uncovered by the lips; the eyes, wide open and fixed, were gazing upward, the white of them alone being visible.

The vicar turned to the doctor.

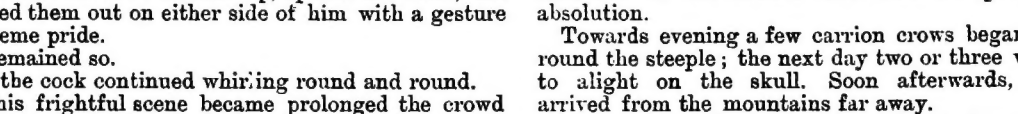
"Is he still alive?" he inquired.

"Perhaps," answered the medical man; "if he has not been struck by apoplexy, nor gone into a fainting fit, immediately followed by cadaverous-like rigidity, he must be in a state of catalepsy, to remain hooked on by the legs in that way!"

"I know what my duty is," exclaimed the priest, and accompanied by some assistants the worthy man ascended to the terrace and took the poor wretch absolution.

Towards evening a few carrion crows began turning round the steeple; the next day two or three were seen to alight on the skull. Soon afterwards, vultures arrived from the mountains far away.

The cock no longer turns, and the legend has it that it will remain stationary until the end of time, as motionless as the stones of the sacred edifice it crowns.



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When the Birds Begin to Sing

By Winifred Graham. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

SUMMARY.

Philip Roche marries Eleanor Grebby, daughter of a farmer, and they spend their honeymoon on the Continent. On their return to Richmond, Eleanor becomes friendly with a frivolous widow, Mrs. Mounteagle, against her husband's wishes. She is introduced to Carol Quinton, who fascinates her. Her husband is heart-broken, and consults his cousin, Erminie Henderson, who comes to stay with them.

CHAPTER VII.

The Shadows Rise and Fall.

"I am so sorry, Giddy, darling," Eleanor writes, "but I can't possibly go to town with you this afternoon, as Philip's cousin, Miss Henderson, has just arrived to stay, and her *fiancé*, Nelson, is coming, too. She is quite jolly, and I thought she would be horrid. Many thanks for sending on that silly little note from Mr. Quinton. Why did he address it to your house? I suppose he forgot 'Lyndhurst,' though I told him the name.

"Ever your devoted,

"Eleanor."

"Dense little idiot!" sighs Giddy. "She cannot understand poor Carol's passion, and yet he kissed her in the hansom. It was like Eleanor to tell me. She always gives herself away. I pity those refreshingly young people who can never keep anything to themselves." Giddy waves up to the windows of Lyndhurst as she drives by.

"Who is that little Jezebel?" asks Erminie.

"My great friend, Mrs. Mounteagle," replies Eleanor.

"Tell her to knock off blanc de perle," responds Miss Henderson, "she would be twice as good-looking."

"I should like to see Giddy if any one interfered with her appearance! But come to the fire, Miss Henderson."

"You must call me Erminie. I am your cousin, you know."

"Yes. What was Philip like as a small boy? You were children together he tells me."

"Yes, and Phil was a little wretch. He used to pull my hair and tease me frightfully, but always ended by spending his much-valued pocket-money in sweets and presents to make it up. Ah! you have a really good-hearted husband, my dear, and I hope you appreciate him!"

"When is Mr. Lane expected?" asks Eleanor, fleeing from the subject of Philip's virtues.

"In about an hour."

"Then I shall go and change my dress now. I look so fearfully dowdy in this brown thing."

"Who is that little Jezebel?"

Eleanor is very fond of talking over her own clothes, but takes small interest in those of other people. She has yawned twice during Erminie's account of her trousseau, and only brightens at the prospect of trying on the hats that are to be sent for approval the following day.

"It will be fun to see how *I* look in them," she says gleefully, and Erminie is so charmed with her frankness that she forgets to condemn the evident self love in Philip's wife.

"It is not often my husband is at home in the daytime; it is quite in your honour," says Eleanor, as Mr. Roche enters. "The City generally claims him. Stay and entertain Erminie, Philip, while I adorn myself. Put on some coal, and make her sit in a comfortable chair."

Then Eleanor flits away, leaving the cousins together.

"What a dear little thing she is, and so pretty!" declares Erminie.

Philip gives her a grateful look.

"Things will go better now you are here," he replies.

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"I say, Phil, you do *like* Nelson, don't you?"

"Of course, he is an awfully good chap. Why do you ask?"

"Only because I think so much of him. Do you know I love him ten times more now than when we were first engaged."

"Really! Well that is on the right side anyhow. He is young, rich, handsome."

"Yes."

Erminie is looking down nervously, and interlacing her fingers.

"If I had loved him so well at first," she sighs, "I could not have deceived him."

"Deceived!" cries Philip. "My dear girl what do you mean?"

"You confided in me, Phil," she continues, "I will confide in you. Yet I hardly know how to put it, it sounds so dreadful! I often drift into wrong-doing unintentionally, then I am afraid to draw back, to own up. Nelson, as I told you, is rich; he imagines that I, too, am well off. I pretended I had money in fact (you may guess how tempting it was) before our engagement, when I wanted, as some people vulgarly term it, 'to catch him!' Bah! what a vile expression! I did not consider the consequences, and the day of reckoning has yet to come, when I must confess myself a dowerless wife, and pretend to have lost through misfortune the money I never possessed. Ah! how lowered I should be in his eyes *if* he knew—*if he knew.*"

She wrings her hands in despair.

"Why did I ever do it? Why did I stoop to anything so mean—so despicable? What shall I say, Philip—how explain? You have always advised me well—if you don't utterly despise me now, show me the way out of my folly."

He is genuinely sorry for Erminie, for he can well imagine how she was drawn into the error, and, thoughtless, fell! He has seen her in many a trouble before to-day, and determines to help her if possible.

A thought strikes him.

"Are you willing," he asks, "to run a risk?"

"Run a risk! What wouldn't I do?"

"I've got an idea, then. I know of some mining shares which are likely to have a very big rise."

Erminie's face brightens.

"Oh, Phil!" she cries, "I was hoping you might suggest putting me into a good thing. Tell me more about it. How much are the shares? What is the mine called?"

"Four shillings, at present. The name is Klerksdorp."

"How many would you advise me to buy?"

"What do you say to putting £2,000 in it?"

"All that I have!" with a little gasp.

"Yes." He speaks convincingly.

"I hardly dare. How much will the shares rise?"

Philip laughs.

"If I knew that," he answers, "it would be worth something! No Erminie, I cannot name the profit, but it is likely to be large. I have the *very best* information on the subject, or I would not fire you to speculate. Under the circumstances, it is the wisest plan to follow. If you lose, well, your husband has plenty of money, and you can bewail the loss of your fortune, with the failure of the 'Klerksdorp.'"

"And if the shares go up, I am saved!" she cries enthusiastically, drawing a deep breath. "Oh! Phil, you are a dear!"

Erminie flings her arms round his neck, and kisses him.

"Two thousand pounds!" she murmurs. "My little all."

"You will get 10,000 shares for that sum, which may become worth—— No, I won't guess, or raise your hopes. You know what speculations are?"

"I do, indeed. Have I not lost many a year's savings already through unsatisfactory ventures? But a drowning woman catches at a straw, and whichever way it turns out, Nelson must never guess that I deceived him! You'll back me up, won't you, and see me through this?"

* * * * *

Nelson Lane and Erminie Henderson have been staying over a week at "Lyndhurst."

The quarrels between Philip and Eleanor have not recurred since their visitor's arrival, for Eleanor has little chance of meeting Giddy. Erminie always wants her attention, and makes such fun of the "painted lady," as

"You are a lucky man, Mr. Lane."

she calls Mrs. Mounteagle, that Eleanor drops the subject of her friend next door.

Nelson is the most pleasant companion imaginable, and is not selfish over his love for Erminie, though it is easy to see how mutually devoted the couple are. They never forget their duty to host or hostess in their infatuation for each other.

Eleanor likes Nelson immensely, and they are the greatest friends.

One morning she is pacing up and down the terrace in the crisp, frosty air, waiting for Erminie to join her. They are all going to the Penn's Ponds to "look at the ice," which is not yet considered safe enough to bear.

Nelson comes up, and walks by her side; the exercise puts a warm glow into their cheeks.

"Erminie is just finishing her letters," he says; "she will be out directly."

"I love Erminie," declares Eleanor; "she is so sweet to me. You are a lucky man, Mr. Lane."

"I wish I were worthy of her," he says, with a sigh.

Eleanor catches the sadness in his tone.

"I believe you are fretting about something," she says. "You look as if you had a weight on your mind."

Nelson laughs off the remark, but his inward care deepens. Even this simple woman can read it at a glance!

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"Fool that I was," he thinks, condemning himself bitterly. "to stoop to such imposture to win the woman I love. But she thought I was rich from the first, and I did not like to undeceive her. I'll work like a horse and make up for it somehow, besides she has money of her own. What a miserable misunderstanding it has been. Why did I let her believe?"

"You are very silent," remarks Eleanor, watching his expression. "What are you thinking of?"

"My sins of the past and how to redeem them in the future."

"Oh! don't bother about your sins this morning, it is much too bright and exhilarating in the frosty air, besides, here is Erminie. Doesn't she look a duck in that fur toque? Come, I am tired of waiting."

* * * * *

Nelson's greatest friend, Jack Woodherst, came to him the following day in the City. They had been like brothers since their boyhood, and were deeply attached to each other.

Buries his face in the cushions.

"Hulloa, old man," cries Nelson, "what's up?" noting his friend's harassed, care-worn look.

Jack holds out his hand mechanically, his eyes are haggard and blood-shot from want of sleep, his face is pale as death—drawn, old!

"I am in awful straits for money," he replies, "and I have come to implore you, Nelson, to buy my shares in the 'Golden Link Mine.' I received them for an interest I had in the property. I know they will become very valuable. I must raise £1,000. Will you let me have it for these shares? They are intrinsically worth a great deal more, but being at present unmarketable, I cannot sell them. They will only stand you in 2s. 6d. a share."

Nelson controls a smile, and casting a glance at his watch chain, thinks that a few links of it are probably of more value than all the proffered shares.

Jack looks pleadingly.

"You *will* help me!"

Violent impulses are disturbing Nelson's mind. He must help his friend, but how can he? Such a sum from his small capital! It would be robbing Erminie. She must be his first consideration.

Then the black thought of how little he has considered her rushes across him, and—the ending. Only one end. He must be utterly ruined after their marriage by some imaginary disaster, which he has not yet concocted.

Yes, utterly ruined! So what difference would this make? He will have enough left to go on for a time, while arranging the impending catastrophe.

These thoughts pass in a second through his mind.

He *will* help his friend! This good action may comfort him, and palliate in a measure his deceit.

"Jack, old fellow," he says, "I'll do it!"

Jack grasps his hand, and is speechless for a moment with relief.

"Nelson," he cries, "you're a brick."

But Nelson Lane cannot endure thanks, and escapes from Jack's gratitude with a lighter heart than he has had for many a long day.

He dismisses the shares from his mind, however, hoping that Jack, who is going back to Western Australia, may sometime repay him.

His wedding-day approaches, and still unconfessed he leads Erminie from the altar, and together they go to foreign climes, each with a secret buried in their hearts.

* * * * *

"I quite miss Erminie and Nelson," says Eleanor, glancing at her husband across the tea-table with a bright smile. "They were most delightful people certainly."

"Yes, dear, and I really think we have been happier since their visit. They were so peaceful, so loving together, perhaps it was the force of good example."

"I don't think there has been one cross word for a fortnight," says Eleanor laughing. She piles up the silken pillows on the sofa beside her.

"Come and sit here close by me, and we will have a little flirtation, like in the old days. Only you must imagine these brocade flowers are real red field poppies, and this sofa is a haycock, just at the back of Copthorne Farm. I can almost hear the lazy hum of the bees, and smell the fresh mown grass. I am not in a silk tea-jacket, but my old blue cotton frock with the tear in the elbow, you remember I caught it on a nail by the gate. Isn't it fun to make believe like children? We don't often play, do we Philip? You must take my hand very gently, under the hay," pulling the cushion over her wrist. "I draw it away, you see, rather shyly, looking deliciously coy, and say: 'Oh! you mustn't, Mr. Roche.'

"Then you are horribly audacious, and kiss me straight off, you know how you used to. We are silent for a few moments, just holding each others' hands in unspeakable content, the sort of ecstasy that comes before marriage.

"We listen to the birds singing—a thrush keeps repeating my name—they generally seem to say something. I remember one at home that used to sit outside my window and chirp: 'Think of it! think of it! think of it!' till I grew quite angry, always recalling an unpleasant incident. 'I *don't want* to think of it!' I would declare, stamping my foot. Oh! Philip, what a good actor you are! You look frightfully in love."

"I am," he murmurs tenderly, clasping her in his arms.

Eleanor laughs incredulously, and lays her head on his shoulder.

"Listen," she says, disengaging herself from his embrace. "We must not shock Sarah!"

The door is flung open.

"Mr. Quinton."

Eleaner rises slowly, her eyes flash with strange brilliancy; she trembles slightly, flushes, pales!

Her husband sees it in a moment—the rush of colour to her cheeks, and the pallor as her hand meets Carol's.

Philip mutters something inaudible under his breath. The chilly air of winter creeps through the hayfield behind Copthorne Farm—the voices of birds are dead—it is cold, cruel January once more!

A horrible presentiment steals over him, numbing his senses—paralysing his brain. This man seems their evil genius, the red firelight playing on his tall slim figure, transforms him in Philip's eyes to a crimson Mephistopheles. Eleanor pours out a fresh cup of tea, and hands it to Mr. Quinton smilingly, as a moment ago she did to her husband.

She moves the poppy-patterned pillows for the newcomer; he is beside her now on the sofa.

Philip feels left out. A jealous pang shoots through him like the stab of a knife, or the burning of iron red-hot on the flesh. Yet, Eleanor, unconscious of the evil feelings she arouses, takes but little notice of her husband, and hangs upon Carol's words with eager interest, agrees with all he says, prevents him leaving twice when he rises to go, and hopes he will "look in again" soon.

"You *might* have asked him to stay and dine, Philip," she declares, when they are again alone. "He is so chatty and amusing. Why, what are you looking so black about?"

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"I can't bear the fellow," mutters Philip. "I should like to knock him down when he looks at you out of those loathsome eyes, and talks rot enough to make one sick. The worst of it is you *like* him. I shudder for your taste."

"You are prejudiced," replies Eleanor hotly, "you can't bear me to have a friend that is not of your own choosing! My taste wasn't a thing to be shuddered at when I married *you*, was it? A selfish, egotistical——"

"Hush, Eleanor," he says, laying his hands firmly but not unkindly on her shoulders. "Don't let us quarrel, you will be sorry afterwards."

"I don't care *that*" (with a snap of her fingers) "whether we quarrel or not. It is better though to speak out than bottle it up inside. There! now you have got your reproachful look again, like the day you said I was vulgar! Let me go," wriggling herself free.

She stifles a sob, bangs through the door, and runs upstairs whistling. The refrain of the "Miller's" song is wafted down to the hall in Eleanor's clear, rich voice:

> I care for nobody, no, not I,
> If nobody cares for me.

Philip walks slowly back to the sofa, gazes a moment at the cushions, then buries his face in their midst, grinding his teeth.

CHAPTER VIII.

Kind Hearts are More than Coronets.

Giddy Mounteagle's face is wreathed in smiles as she talks animatedly to Eleanor.

"Yes, my dear," she says triumphantly, "Lady MacDonald comes to me to-morrow. She is one of the smartest women in town and moves in the best circles. She will stay the night and be the belle of my 'At home' the following day. I long to introduce her to you. Such a stately, aristocratic-looking woman, a little 'difficult' sometimes, but usually charming. She takes offence if you introduce her to any one not *quite* up to the mark, and, since her marriage, is very particular whom she knows. I used to see a great deal of her before she was Lady MacDonald, but lately we have drifted apart."

"Is she stuck up?" asks Eleanor bluntly.

"No, that is hardly the word. 'Proud,' shall we say: 'dignified.'"

"Because she has married an old lord? How amusing! I shall like to see her."

"I will bring her to tea with you, Eleanor," replies Mrs. Mounteagle, feeling she is conferring an immense honour on Mrs Roche. "Mind you use that duck of a service, and wear your heliotrope gown. You look so *distingué* in it, and dear Lady MacDonald notices clothes."

"Any more orders?" asks Eleanor laughing.

Giddy's glance sweeps over the room.

"Yes. Remove that awful photograph, the one of the old people outside a farmhouse. It is not ornamental, and quite spoils the beauty of that corner. Lady MacDonald is so critical it might catch her eye."

"Then she will have to sit with her back to it or suffer," replies Eleanor staunchly. "It is my favourite picture, and I don't mean to take it down."

Giddy sighs, puts on a martyred expression, and kicks the footstool.

"Your taste is as terrible as ever," she declares sadly, shaking her head. "What would you have been, Eleanor, if I hadn't taken you in hand?"

"I don't know, dear," she cries, feeling she has been ungrateful. "You have done me no end of good turns! But I love that portrait, it is sentiment."

"An old nurse of yours and her husband?" asks Giddy.

Eleanor flushes rosy red.

She would like to say "my parents," but dreads Giddy's cynical smile. She could not bear to hear them scoffed at, even in their absence.

Instead she murmurs

"That woman nursed me in her arms as a baby, tended me in childhood—loved me always."

Eleanor, on tiptoe, kisses the two faces in the photo.

"They are good," she says, "generous, kind-hearted; they might grace the grandest palace——"

"And smile at the claims of long descent," quotes the widow. "What a true little woman you are, Eleanor! Sometimes I half envy you, *gaucheries* and all!"

"I can't help being stupid, Giddy; I was not born wise, like you."

"Yet you really have developed marvellously under my training. The way you kept up the conversation at that dull luncheon party last week was admirable. I could not have done it better myself. As it was, a wretched sore throat condemned me to silence. How your badinage with Quinton astonished our hostess! She sat up so straight in her chair, I thought her fringe curls would reach the ceiling. She will never invite you there again, but it was simply splendid.

"'What do you think of Mrs. Roche?' I asked her afterwards, when Carol was bending over you in the window seat. She drew in her thin lips and muttered: '*Most* refreshing!' in a tone that meant something very different."

"What did it mean?" cries Eleanor, with a gasp.

"I am in too great a hurry now to interpret," answers Giddy, kissing her effusively. "Ta-ta, beloved—and mind you adopt your best Society airs for Lady MacDonald to-morrow. She will swallow any amount, and may be very useful to us in town. *Comprenez-vous?*"

* * * * *

Eleanor is quite in a flutter the following afternoon. Her room looks bright with flowers purchased that morning

Kisses the faces in the photos.

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"We couldn't help bringing him," says Mr. Grebby.

in the town; her Crown Derby tea-service is set out on a new and dainty cloth, which had been laid by for an occasion. The curtains are drawn to shut away the dreary fog, and fire-light mingles with the rosy rays from a tall lamp. Eleanor is still quite in a tremble lest the oil should smell, as Sarah frequently fails over the art of wick trimming.

"How does my heliotrope go with this chair?" she asks, settling her sleeves, and critically contrasting the yellow brocade furniture with the shade of her gown.

Sarah assures her the effect is most desirable, as she places a pink iced cake by the tray.

"Don't keep Lady MacDonald waiting on the doorstep; you might be in the hall ready to answer the bell."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And if the fog gets denser light the gas outside."

Eleanor draws her chair to the fire, and pretends to read a Society paper, but her thoughts are far from the fashion article.

She is supremely contented with herself and her surroundings. Her hair has its prettiest wave to-day, she is wearing her smartest toilette, and a new pair of bronzed beaded shoes. Her only trial in life at this moment is the propensity shown by her diamond crescent to turn over in its bed of lace, and reveal the back, with a fastening for a hairpin. She fixes it in her fringe at night.

A little tremble of excitement rushes over Eleanor; the bell rings.

Sarah flings open the door, and Giddy Mounteagle sails into the room with Lady MacDonald. Mrs. Roche feels quite small and insignificant under the stranger's patronising smile.

Lady MacDonald raises her long-handled *lorgnette* to scrutinise her surroundings.

Giddy is conscious of the offending photograph. Eleanor draws forward the largest chair. Lady MacDonald sinks gracefully back among the cushions, her head poised on one side—she always holds it so. Some admirer once told her it was like a flower bending on its stem with the weight of its own beauty.

"Oh! the fog outside," she cries, with an affected little

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cough, first cousin to a sigh. "I suppose it rises from the river."

"Yes, and creeps into your soul, and clogs your brain," adds Giddy, "the yellow land of mist is not attractive."

"No one will turn up at your party to-morrow," says Eleanor, "if it doesn't lift."

"I never thought of that. The professionals will be stuck on the line, perhaps, and we shall have a songless, tuneless, 'musical,' with only locals to eat our cakes."

"My husband has promised to fetch me to-morrow; I must be back in town by seven, for two or three evening engagements," says Lady MacDonald.

"Then I am glad mine is an afternoon," murmurs Giddy, "or I should not have secured you. It is delightful of dear Lord MacDonald to drive down."

"Oh! he always does what I tell him," she replies, with a superior smile.

She has a quantity of jingling golden ornaments hanging from a chatelaine at her waist, a gold crown on the handle of her *lorgnette*, and so many rings on her long pink fingers that they bulge over her knuckles. Her nails are manicured to appear almost crimson, her teeth are shining white under her curved lips, that look capable of bitter sayings and smiles of scorn.

"The fire is too hot," she says, laying one soft hand against a still softer cheek. Her complexion is a marvel. Eleanor hands her a painted screen.

"What a charming picture," continues Lady MacDonald. "I adore nymphs. Did you paint this, Mrs. Roche?"

"Yes," replied Giddy, "Eleanor is a perfect artist."

Eleanor raises her eyebrows, staring at Giddy in amazement, never having touched a brush in her life.

"Do you exhibit?"

Giddy again answers for Eleanor.

"Mr. Roche won't let her, he thinks any publicity *infra dig* for a woman."

"Perhaps he is right," says Lady MacDonald; "I know Edward won't allow me to pen a line for the press, though I have quite a genius for scribbling. He is so mad because people get my picture sometimes for the Society papers. I have to hide them away from him. The last one caught his eye hung up on a bookstall, and he was nearly suffocated with wrath on the spot, and could not speak for three minutes."

"The penalty of beauty," cries Giddy gaily.

"Are you one of the types of English beauty?" asks Eleanor.

"Oh! no. Nothing so common. I leave that to Irish belles, and ladies of the ballet."

She raises her delicate chin, and rests her languid eyes on Mrs. Roche.

The door opens, and Sarah's voice announces:

"Mr. and Mrs. Grebby!"

Eleanor starts to her feet, and rushes forward.

"Father! Mother!"

There they stand. Mrs. Grebby in a black satin gown, a long gold chain suspended round her neck, a Paisley shawl crossed over her chest, and a close bonnet of quilted blue satin.

Mr. Grebby, with a sparse frill of grey hair growing right round his face, his chin and long upper lip guiltless of hirsute appendages. A gorgeous suit of a very baggy cut, flowered satin waistcoat, and a basket of apples and cooking pears in his hand, as a present to his daughter.

At his heels a shaggy dog, blind in one eye and toothless—one that in its puppyhood had leaped and played with Eleanor in the green fields of Copthorne Farm.

A cry of delight breaks from her, as she hugs her parents in turn, and catches sight of her old favourite.

"Rover—my darling!" she exclaims, sinking on her knees to fondle the dog.

He springs up with his muddy feet on the shoulders of her beautiful heliotrope dress. His claws catch in the lace, but she heeds them not, only laughs gleefully as he licks her face.

"We couldn't help bringing him," says Mr. Grebby, wiping his brow with a red handkerchief, which is shining and damp from excitement. "Poor fellow, he *did* want to come! Black Bess will miss him, won't she?"

"We took it into our heads sudden like to visit London and surprise you, dearie," Mrs. Grebby vouchsafes.

"How lovely of you!" cries Eleanor, in her joy forgetting the guests by the fire, then she turns and faces them.

Giddy feels as *if* cold water is coursing down her back, the palms of her hands are icy cold. The feathers in her friend's hat seem dancing up and down before her eyes.

Lady MacDonald is positively glaring through her tortoiseshell glasses.

There is an air of offended dignity in her mien, as she looks the couple up and down freezingly.

"This is my father and mother," says Eleanor, an elated smile upon her lips, a merry sparkle in her eyes. What do these people matter, now that her parents have come to her new home? She longs to show them everything, and watch their wonder.

"Mr. and Mrs. Grebby, Lady MacDonald, Mrs. Mounteagle," she continues. "Now, Ma dear, you sit here," pulling up a chair between Giddy and Lady MacDonald. "Loosen your shawl, or you'll scorch, and I will give you some tea."

Mrs. Grebby gazes in awestruck wonder at the grandly dressed visitors, and her daughter's elaborate clothes.

Mr. Grebby stumps round the room, remarking on everything.

Mr. Grebby stumps round the room, remarking on everything.

"Well there! What do you say to *that* for a picture," addressing his wife. "Tell Ma to come here, Eleanor, I want 'er to see this 'orse, and the lady on the moon in the next frame. I wish you could paint pictures, my girl, but maybe Mr. Roche will 'ave you taught."

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Giddy flushes scarlet. Lady MacDonald fans herself violently with the screen. Mrs. Grebby takes the tiny cup Eleanor hands her, and turns it round to examine it. Then her eyes fall on the slices of thin bread and butter, the dainty biscuits, and minute squares of buttered toast.

"Don't you get 'ungry, dearie?" she asks. "I thought you'd be sure to 'ave a knife-and-fork tea, living in this style."

Her daughter laughs heartily. A wicked desire to shock Lady Macdonald, as Giddy has so often excited her to do on previous occasions, seizes Eleanor.

"Oh, *no*, Ma! We have big dinners at eight o'clock. Five courses and serviettes. You ask Lady MacDonald!"

"I don't call this a cup," declares Mr. Grebby, grinning broadly as Eleanor hands him his tea. "It's more like an acorn!" He takes half-a-dozen slices of bread and butter and munches them hungrily.

"I'm a bit peckish, my girl," he says. "But then we've had a long day, and fastin' don't agree with me! We went to the Tower, Madame Tussaud's, and the Exhibition of Tortures in Leicester Square. We liked that best of all."

"But what did you do with Rover?" asks Eleanor, exciting the dog to jump on the sofa and patting his wet nose.

"We left him at Cousin Harriet's. We can stay the night here with you, and after that we are going to put up a bit at her lodging-house in Bloomsbury. Ma was set on bringing old Rover to see you, as we think he won't last long now."

"The dear fellow!" murmurs Eleanor, cutting the pink cake. "Some more tea, Lady MacDonald?"

"*No* thank you," and the severity of the tone startles Eleanor.

She fears she has committed some deadly offence in offering this proud beauty a second cup. Never was there a more grotesque tea-party on the terrace than in Eleanor's boudoir that afternoon. Giddy with deepest shame, resentment and horror, raging in her heart. Lady MacDonald haughty and disdainful, eyeing the homely couple as she would the beasts at the Zoo. Mrs. Grebby, speechless in admiring silence, fingering the frills of the sofa cushions, and taking in the pattern of the wall-paper, her breast swelling with pride and gratification. Mr. Grebby, his large boots on the brightly polished fender, his red face wreathed in smiles, as bucolic a specimen of manhood as Copthorne could produce.

Lastly, Eleanor, looking perfectly fairy-like under the red lamp, caressing the old dog with her slim white hands, and talking first to one guest, then to the other, with supreme good nature, her father's basket of apples on her knee.

"I must send some of these pears in to you, Giddy," she says, "I can't spare the apples, but your cook may like to stew——"

She pauses, reading her friend's expression of disdain.

She stammers something unintelligible to hide her confusion, wondering what she has said to offend, and changing the subject, asks hesitatingly:

"Did—er did you put me up for the 'Butterflies?'"

Mrs. Mounteagle had only that morning requested Lady MacDonald to second Eleanor.

Now she grows crimson at the thought, for Lady MacDonald is her trump card in the club.

"Thinking it over," replies Giddy. "I am quite sure Mr. Roche won't approve of us poor little Butterflies. He will imagine that a club must necessarily be emancipated, that it will lead you into latchkey habits, and advance your ideas too rapidly. I should advise you to stay at home, my dear, and" (with a cynical little smile) "stew your pears."

Mrs. Grebby has drawn the parish magazine from the recesses of an enormous pocket in her petticoat, and hands it to her daughter.

"I thought you'd like to read the news," she says. "Mrs. King's baby was christened last Sunday, and the little Browns have spread the measles in the schools."

Lady MacDonald and Giddy exchange glances that palpably say: "Why don't we go?"

The fact is Mrs. Mounteagle has been rooted to the spot, paralysed as it were by a sense of shame and humiliation.

Lady MacDonald has watched the scene as at a play, a comedy in low-life, acted for the benefit of the stalls and boxes.

"We really must go," murmurs Giddy hastily, catching her breath. She rises, gathering up a long feather boa to wind round her neck.

Lady MacDonald follows her example, her jingling chatelaine clanks irritatingly, as if protesting at being found in such company.

She draws on a light kid glove, proffering Eleanor her finger-tips.

"*Good*-bye, Mrs. Roche," she drawls. "I have so enjoyed a peep at your little *coterie* to-day, but we really *must* not intrude ourselves upon you longer, you will have so many *home* topics to discuss."

Mrs. Mounteagle refrains from her customary caress, whereat Eleanor remarks:

"How pale you look, Giddy! Are you ill?"

"Yes," she replies, under her breath, "I have over-eaten myself—overdone with APPLES!"

(To be continued.)

A ✣ TEN-POUND ✣ PRIZE.

(See Next Page.)

On the next page is a puzzle picture composed of 88 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £10 to the first person who sends the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, the whole of the solutions received at 17, Henrietta Street in any one day will be considered together. In the very unlikely chance of two or more correct solutions being included in one day's post, the prize will be given to the sender of the *neatest* one. Consolation Prizes will be awarded at the discretion of the Editor.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, March 3rd, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "March."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down.

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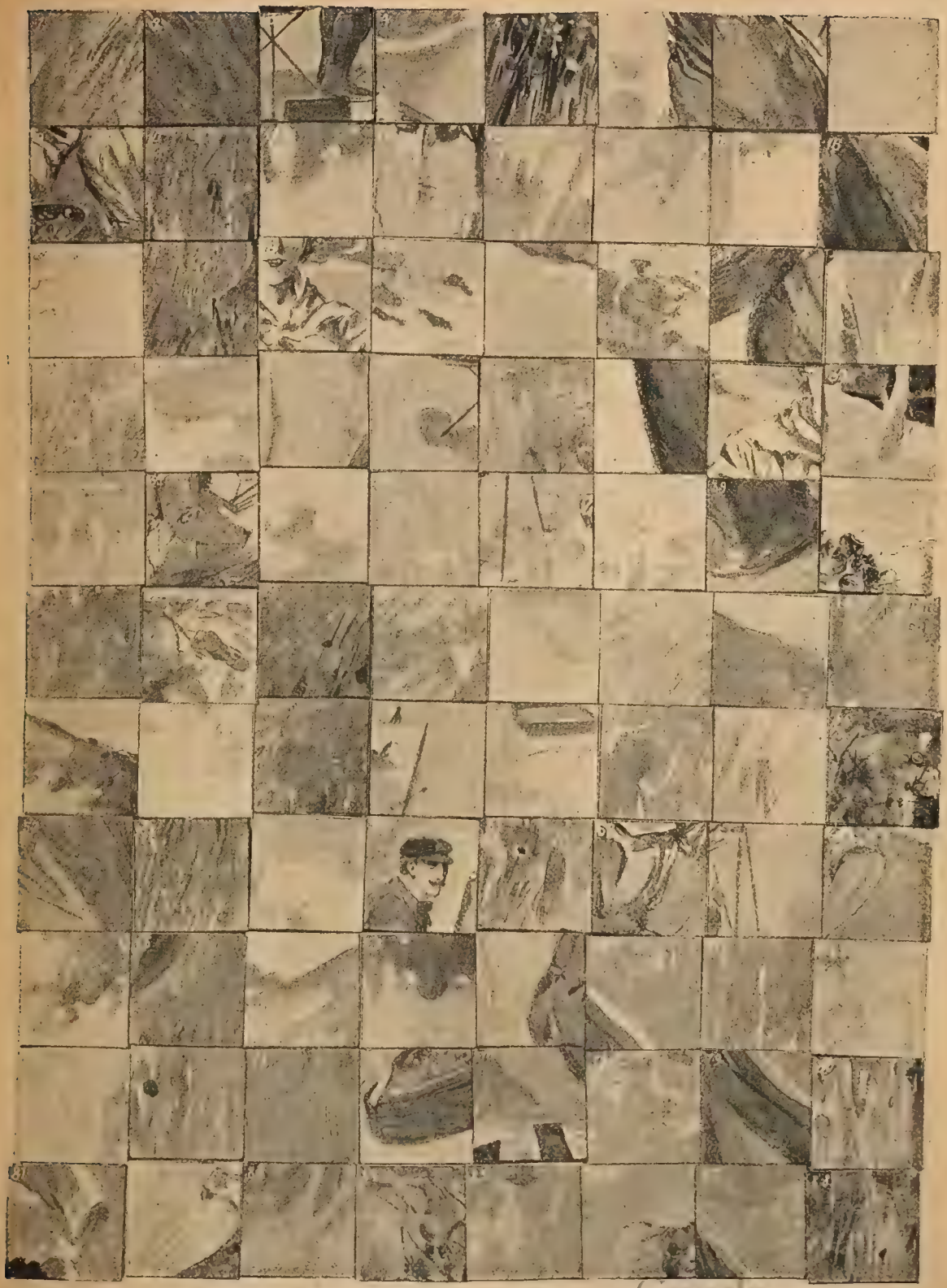

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A Mother of Mexico.

"Mamacita," cried Blaso Aldana, coming across the *patio* with old Dolores, her sometime nurse and present maid, shuffling at her heels; "mamacita! The Saenz were robbed last night. The door of the *sala* was broken in and the house ransacked. Lupe's pearls are gone, with all the silver cups, and spoons, and ladles, and Julio's suit that cost three hundred dollars, and, oh! a *lot* of money Don Lauro had in his chest."

Cleofas Mora, widow of Aldana, shook her head in silent comment. She had heard all too much in the last few weeks of the depredations committed by the lawless gentry who had just begun to work their way up to Chihuahua from the States below.

"And, mamma," said Blasita, "Lupe Saenz says that Lorenzo Garcia has been walking past her window every night this week, and she is quite sure he cares more for her than for Augustina."

"*Chismes!*" then answered Cleofas Mora. "Why do you retail gossip? Have I not heart and hands full already, that you should come babbling of Guadalupe Saenz and her flirtations? I thank the saints that my Augustina is a prudent child, who does not take up with every young blade that appears on the Alameda. Who is this Lorenzo Garcia?—whence comes he?—to whom does he bring letters? In my young days we knew who a man might be before we owned he watched under our windows. A pretty pass we are coming to."

Now, truth to tell, Doña Cleofas was, on the average, little of a scold; but to-day she was sore distraught. She was the fortunate possessor of means, moderate enough to be sure, but still adequate for her needs, and she and hers were gifted with sound minds and bodies. But at the present moment she was much exercised in spirit, and over the very two matters on which Blasita had touched so glibly.

There was no doubt that Lorenzo Garcia had been making tentative advances towards the house of Aldana. And there was equal certainty that Augustina was rather kindly disposed to hearken to the voice of the charmer, coyly as yet, it was true, and not to a compromising degree; but Doña Cleofas foresaw a lively contest for the day when the girl should definitely decide for her quasi admirer, for Augustina was endowed with some tenacity of purpose.

Lorenzo Garcia was a stranger in Chihuahua, for whom none could vouch, and, for all his handsome eyes and suave address, Doña Cleofas had no notion of passing over to his control one-third of the snug little sum she had laid by as dowry for her daughters. Now, too, Doña Cleofas had another source of disturbance, which she would by no means impart to her household, composed exclusively of women as it was. In the silent hours of the preceding night she had heard clearly and distinctly the sound of feet moving cautiously in the little court of her domicile, and her big watch-dog Pinto had been found stiff and dead that morning, although none save herself had thought of the cause she confidently assigned for his demise.

So far as appeared, there was no protection to be had. The Aldana abode was rather isolated, and the very peculiarities of architectural form which render a Mexican house almost like a fortress to outside attack, virtually cut off communication with and assistance from the outside world. once the foe has gained foothold within the gates. In those days the police force of Chihuahua, now admirably organised, was insignificant both as to numerical strength and effectiveness. Then Doña Cleofas, imbued with the spirit of woman's subjugation and social passivity of her race and day, felt that she could call on no man of her acquaintance for succour or protection. There was nothing to do but await the course of events.

The day went on, slowly enough, perhaps, to Augustina, before whose eyes the form of Lorenzo appeared not, but all too swiftly to her mother, enduring a sort of breathless apprehension. Night fell, and the little family, shut inside their four walls, passed the long winter evening as best they might. At bed-time Doña Cleofas called her people together, and, to their surprise and against their protests, marshalled them away to a great room, a guest-chamber rarely used, which lay at the rear of the house, towards the kitchens, and which was strongly defended, having no windows, but only heavy oaken doors. These Doña Cleofas locked and barred securely, and mustered her flock together.

"Hush, Blasa! and you, too, Augustina. But look you at Eduarda, the youngest of you all—how silently she obeys, while you set up a clamour. Why do I bring you here? Because I will so, then. How now! Am I no longer mistress in my own abode? Here are three beds with ample pillows—get you to rest. And you, Beata, Hermelinda, and Dolores"—to the sewing-women—"spread out your blankets here on the floor, near the *ninas*, and let me hear not so much as a chirp from one of you till I call you in the morning."

Thus, disguising her tenderness and anxious fears with severe speech, like many a woman of greater lore before her, Doña Cleofas summarily locked the one remaining door from the outside and marched away alone. She was confident that if trouble were imminent, it would come in the direction of the little shop that was her source of income, where was a respectable stock of goods of worth, portable, besides her strong box itself—no patent money-safes being obtainable in Chihuahua.

Thither, then, to the store-room behind the shop did Doña Cleofas wend her way, and near by its weak point, a small door, opening on the *patio*, she seated herself in a great arm-chair of willow-work, and for a brief time gave herself up to the luxury of weeping. For, with all her force and decision of character, Doña Cleofas was but a woman, and it might be on the cards that she should gaze not on the faces of her children again.

She had brought her arsenal with her; no cunning fabrication of Colt's, nor many-balled Winchester; for these inventions of murderous man, to maim and slay his fellows, Doña Cleofas had not the slightest use; she was the traditional woman in her horror of firearms, and would not have known how to make offensive use of them, unless as missiles to be hurled against an intruder's head. But alongside her, and resting against her knee, lay a heavy long-helved axe, whose keen, broad edge had never been turned against knot of

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stubborn oak nor the gnarled roots that serve as fuel thereabouts. And Doña Cleofas had all faith in the power of her own right arm to wield it hard and well against a foe.

The night went on, the silence was unbroken, and Doña Cleofas slept—slept hard and fast until, all at once, with a start, she was as wide awake as ever she was in her life, and realising that very close to her the throat of a man was emitting laboured yet rapid breathings. The auditory sense was strong and definite in Doña Cleofas, and it took her not many seconds to decide that the intruder had crawled through an opening cut in the panel of the door before her, and there he was, apparently caught fast, sprawling, clawing, and wriggling to force himself farther in and clear of the opening. Now and then, in the fellow's contortions, his hot breath swept the hand of the watcher.

Doña Cleofas drew a deep, soundless breath, and, rising swiftly, noiselessly to her feet, raised the axe in the air. Swift as light it fell—*chack!* One mighty, convulsive writhe, and the man with that last twisting shudder had drawn himself past the grip of the ragged planks, and Doña Cleofas, stooping resolutely, drew him quite within with as natural a movement as her quivering nerves could compass.

A few moments of silence; then, barely audible, a sibilant whisper: "Thou, Lencho, is all well?" Through the hollowed hands of Doña Cleofas an answer was sent back: "All well—come on!" Then, almost breath for breath, that same scene, unviewed in the great darkness, was enacted, and yet again.

But the third time, what with the strain on her over-wrought nerves, and the tax on her aching muscles, as she dragged aside three well-grown bodies—the third time, and little wonder Doña Cleofas could not answer the question: "Art safely in? Does all go well?" But the fourth man, cautiously putting his head within the gap to reconnoitre just missed the blow of the heavy axe.

Staying the steps of a tottering woman.

"*Por Dios!* but what was that? Some treachery is here," his voice broke forth. "And—the earth beneath the door is wet—with something slippery—hot—good Heavens—*with blood!*" There was a smothered howl of rage and fear, the rush of scuffling feet, a ladder rattling against the wall, as it was drawn up to the roof, and Doña Cleofas was alone, but for the dead.

The dawn had not yet opened into day when a watchman, staying the steps of a tottering woman, knocked at the great *zaguan* door of the *Jefe Politico's* house, and, after a parley with the servant on duty and his summons to the master, the prefect came forth, looking curiously at the pale, haggard face of his early guest.

"But what is this, good Doña Cleofas? I cannot credit the tale, and yet your blood-stained hands and garb—well, well! You go not hence on foot, nor fasting. After so sore a struggle you must want strength. Come in and sit you down while coffee and wine are brought to us, and the horses are put to my coach."

But if the good woman had seemed faint and ill when she sought the aid of the prefect, she had well-nigh quite recovered her wonted calm and self-reliance when she stood, an hour later, beside that dignitary and watched his wondering face, while he stripped the black masks from the faces of the dead.

"This is 'El Zorro,' the Fox," he murmured, consulting a formidable-looking paper adorned with great red seals; "that is to say, he corresponds in every particular with the description of that bandit sent up for my instruction by my esteemed colleague, the *Jefe* of Zacatecas. This bearded one must be—yes—the Tarantula; and this one—I seem to know his face."

"No doubt," said Doña Cleofas drily; "with the name of Lorenzo Garcia, he has been playing the gallant to such of our girls as would hear him, and, no doubt, getting from them the points to use in his raids. Faith, one of my own pullets has listened to his purr! Señor Jefe, if I have done aught that merits praise, I pray your licence to go and bring the girl, to whom, perhaps your grace will say a word. A hard test for her?—an awful sight? 'Tis so, your worship; but the chit needs the lesson. What might it not have been for her mother?"

All ignorant of what was going on, the rest of Doña Cleofas's flock thought it hard she should forbid them to follow Tina; but so the dame decrees, and locked them fast again, all breakfastless, pending the place was freed from its ghastly sights. And never, in Augustina's life to come, would she forget the awful scene, as she came to where the three stark dead men lay, drawn by her mother's hand.

"Santo Cristo!" she cried; "what is it?—what does it mean?"

"It means, my child," the *Jefe* hastened to answer, "that your ready acceptance of the attentions of a stranger might have brought ruin and death upon your house. As it is, your good wise mother has averted the danger, and even has added to your dowry, since to her accrue the fifteen hundred good, hard dollars offered by the paternal government for these three robbers she has killed, the leaders of an infamous band. Yes," he answered her piteous look; "yes, even this handsome Lencho, who was the decoy, the traitor, the spy, the worst of all the lot. What! Catch her! she is fainting! Ah, well, in truth he is, or was, a handsome scamp. Your axe has marred his beauty, good Cleofas!"

The family Aldana still live in Chihuahua. The daughters all are married, and the unwritten history of the city, noted for its obedient, discreet maidens, places foremost in the rank of good daughters, the three of Doña Cleofas, and most submissive and dutiful of them all, Augustina.

Y. H. Addis.

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THE STORY OF A MYSTERIOUS BANK NOTE.

ON Saturday, December 5th, 1880, I sailed from Liverpool to New York in the Cunard liner Gallia, then a comparatively new boat. It was certainly not the best time of year to choose for an ocean voyage; but it was not a matter of choice with me. In my capacity as special Queen's messenger I was obliged to take out to the embassy at Washington some official documents of an urgent character, but as regards the nature of which I can say no more. No time was to be lost, and on the Friday night preceding, when just sitting down to dinner with a couple of friends whom I had asked to join me in the discussion of a brace of pheasants from my eldest brother's well-stocked preserves, I was summoned post-haste to the Foreign Office.

Leaving my wife to do the honours alone, I bade good-bye to her and my comfortable warm dining-room, and took the first train up to town, getting my papers and instructions and going on to Liverpool by the midnight express from St. Pancras. It can be imagined that my preparations for a sea voyage were not on a very extensive scale. But Queen's messengers for foreign service are used to that sort of thing. I don't count the eight home service chaps who for two hundred a year make daily trips by special train up to Balmoral, or down to Windsor, or Osborne, and back, with a dispatch-box full of papers with which to beguile the time of Her Most Gracious Majesty, and bring home to the nation that she works for a living. These fellows have an easy time of it.

But we foreigners—there were twelve of us always ready, if not willing, to start off to Brazil or Siberia at an hour's notice. But we get four hundred pounds a year, with an allowance of one pound a day and travelling expenses when away from home, which is not to be sneezed at in these days when lots of fellows from Oxford and Cambridge are glad enough to go out as under-gatekeepers. Still one isn't apt to think of that when compelled to go away on a sudden for thousands of miles at such a time of year.

As we dropped down the Mersey and headed down channel in a chilly, drizzling rain, I didn't know a soul on board. My mission was of a sufficiently secret character (how little the general world knows of what diplomacy is doing for its good!) to make it expedient that my identity should be unknown to even the officers of the ship; otherwise I should have been duly accredited to Captain Hains and have fared like a prince. I went into the saloon and sat down to write up my diary notes in my pocket-book.

In looking over the papers in the pockets I came on a bill from a ready-money shop in London, where my wife had bought some new drawing-room curtains, and which had been sent down by post that morning. In the sudden hurry of my coming away I had forgotten all about it. It wouldn't keep till I came back, and I didn't want my wife bothered with it. What was I to do? The bill was for a few shillings under five pounds. I looked over my money, and, as good luck would have it, found a five-pound note which I hadn't changed into American money. I would send that, and they could send the change and receipt to my wife.

Getting a sheet of my ship's notepaper and a couple of envelopes from the saloon steward, I wrote a few lines explaining, inclosed the bill and note, first entering, as was my custom, the number 76-1, 28396, in my pocket-book, fastened up the envelope, addressed it, stuck my last English stamp on it, and put it back in my pocket-book, preparatory to posting it at Queenstown.

The ship wasn't full. Transatlantic steamers seldom are at that time of year, either with passengers or cargo, so that the first day's dinner as we rounded Holyhead, and the next morning's breakfast as we lay at Queenstown waiting for the mails, were sufficient for the completion of the mental catalogue, which, when on a sea voyage, I invariably make of my travelling companions. With the exception of two men, whose acquaintance I subsequently made, there were none who could be classed as out of the common run of men and women as they go.

One of these two was named Kimball—Professor Kimball, as I found upon inspection of the printed list which the Cunard company so unlimitedly and gratuitously bestow upon each passenger—and the way we made acquaintance was thus: He was my next door neighbour at meals, and our acquaintance began by the usual formula: "First voyage, sir?"

After that we were good friends whenever we met. He was a man of about fifty, I should say, with a foreign air, and pompous manner. In his buttonhole he wore the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour. As for the other man, he came up to me when I was sitting alone in the smoking-room while we lay at Queenstown, and while Divine service was going on in the saloon, asked if I read at sea, and offered to lend me a book.

"My name is Jervise," he said. "Oh, you won't find it in the list. You needn't look. I only took my passage the day the ship sailed, and they hadn't time to print it."

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I thought this strange, as I had done the same, yet my name was in.

"Here is my card, if you doubt it, sir," he went on in rather a hurt tone, as he fumbled in his pocket. "I haven't got one, but I will give you one again."

I told him it didn't matter in the least, and he continued, with a pleased smile: "But to return to the books. I know there's a library on board, but everyone knows what a ship's library is—'Robinson Crusoe,' the 'Swiss Family Robinson.' There's sure to be a Robinson somewhere." I laughed, and told him I had the honour of possessing the name of Robinson myself, whereat he coloured slightly, and said: "No offence, I hope, sir." I told him not the least, and he went on again: "Now I've laid in a good stock of recent novels—just the sort of light reading for a sea-voyage like this. I'll show them to you if you come down in my cabin. Come along now."

He conducted me to one of the best state-rooms in the ship—an outside one—and well forward of the saloon and machinery. I was surprised at this, and told him so.

"I thought you said you only took your passage yesterday?" I said.

"That's just where it is," he replied; "these good rooms are always kept back at this season, and the inferior ones sold first. There were only good ones left when I applied. See?" and he laughed at the cleverness of it. I confess I didn't see, but didn't tell him so. I thought I'd find out from someone who knew better how these matters were managed.

I bade good-bye to my wife.

He showed me all his books—a varied assortment of novels principally, with here and there a work on magic and sleight-of-hand. "The Memoirs of Robert Houdin" was one of them, I remember. We chatted along pleasantly for half-an-hour, smoking cigarettes with the door shut and port open, which—the ship not being under way—the steward hadn't fastened.

"You seem to take a considerable interest in this sort of thing," I said, picking up a magician book.

"Well, yes, I do," he answered; "I have for some years. Indeed, in a small way, I've gone in for amateur conjuring, and have taken lessons from no less than—" he said some name that I couldn't catch. "I find a good deal of amusement in it. I will give you a few 'sleights' to show you what an amateur can do."

I told him I should only be too glad, and thereupon went through a short series of sleight-of-hand tricks, such as vanishing coins, passing two into one, and crushing a lemon through the top of his portmanteau, afterwards picking it out of my hair—very simple, commonplace ones as he claimed, being only "palming," as he called it, but at the same time very cleverly and neatly performed.

"By Jove!" said I, "you ought to go on the stage. No one could do better than that."

"I did think of it once," he said, in a curiously gloomy tone, but brightening up the next instant. "Oh, those are not anything. I wish I could show you something really worth notice. Let me see. Yes, I might do that one. Wait a moment." He went to a small black leather bag, such as London city men carry, and unlocking it, looked it well over. "No, I am sorry to say, I haven't one. I thought I had. It's too bad, for it's an awfully pretty trick."

I asked him what he wanted, thinking it might be some article common to Transatlantic passengers.

"It's only a five-pound note. But never mind. I'll try something else."

I am sure I wish I had let him; but I gave my pocket-book a look through. I found nothing but circular notes upon Coutts & Co, a few American five-dollar pieces, and some loose silver.

"I thought I had a five-pound note," I said, and then remembered the letter. "Stay. I think I can find one, but I'm afraid it is fastened up." I took the letter out of its compartment, and found in doing so the unused envelope I had put in with it. "It's all right, though, for I can put it up again in this." I tore open the letter and took out the five-pound note and handed it to him. He took it and crumpled it up quickly in his fingers, shut his hand an instant and opened it again. The note was gone. My face must have shown the concern I felt, for he said:

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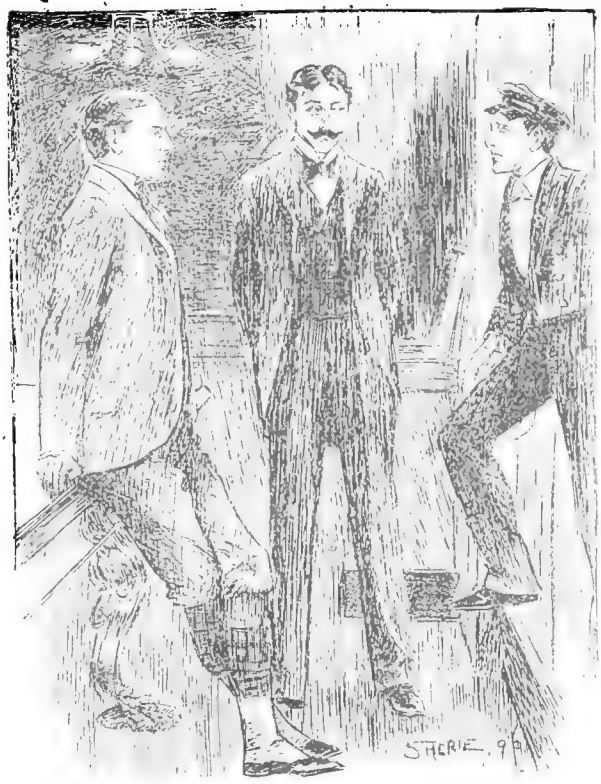

"Any letters, sir? Mail-bag just going."

"Oh, don't be alarmed. It's safe enough now," drawing it out as if from his skull-cap, and smoothing it out between his hands; "but we'll give it another test." He struck a match along his leg, and, putting the edge of the note into the flame before I could stay his arm, it flared up as though soaked in turpentine, and fell in curled-up ashes on the floor.

"I say!" I exclaimed, quite carried away by the dexterous deception, "you have no right to do that."

He laughed a merry laugh.

"No harm I assure you." He put his fingers into the watch-pocket of my waistcoat—a pocket I never use, by-the-bye—drew out the note, and handed it to me.

"There's your note safe and sound," he said, "and I should advise you to put it up again in your letter as quick as you can—not through fear of its ultimate destruction at my hands, but there goes the bell of the tender, and you've no time to lose if you wish to post it in the ship's bag."

"It's the most wonderful trick I ever saw!" I went on, still lost in amazement and admiration at the simplicity of the trick. At that moment one of the stewards approached the door.

"Any letters, sir? Mail-bag just going."

"Yes, stop a moment. Here's one." I hastily folded up the note and thrust it into the fresh envelope with the bill and letter, licked the flap and smoothed it down, turning the letter over in doing so. "By Jove! I have forgotten the address, and I've no pen and ink."

"Here's an indelible pencil," said Jervise, "it will do as well."

I took the pencil and wrote down the address as quickly as possible, and then discovered I had no stamp.

"Botheration!" I said, trying to get the one off the old envelope. "I can't without tearing it."

"Oh, here's a stamp, too," said Jervise, quietly taking one out of his pocket-book. "It's all my fault, so it's only right I should stand some of the consequences."

I stuck the stamp on, and rushed up to the purser's office myself, not wishing to trust it to the steward after his seeing the note put in it. I was just in time, and dropped it in as the purser was in the act of locking the bag. I went back to Jervise's room, intending to pay him for the stamp, and in the hope of seeing some more tricks. He had gone. Presuming he had gone up on deck, as the steamer was getting under way, I went up there. But I could see him nowhere. Presently the gong sounded for luncheon—rather late, owing to the delay of the mails—and I went down. The Professor was there before me.

"Well, sir," he said, "been ashore, I suppose? I haven't seen you all the morning."

"No," I told him; "I've been down below, in a friend's room—at least an acquaintance, I made on board—and he's been doing some most wonderful tricks."

"Tricks?" he said, knitting his brow; "tricks, sir?"

"Why, conjuring tricks."

The Professor drew himself up quickly, and put down his knife and fork with a very visible start.

"Conjuring tricks?" he repeated; "and who, pray, sir, is there on board this ship who can do conjuring tricks? Perhaps you may not be aware, sir, that the art of necromancy, legerdemain, sleight-of-hand, prestidigitation, or whatever else you may choose to call the profession of magic, is my business, sir. I am now going out to a series of engagements in the States. My stage name is De Ville—suggestive and French, both most necessary in these days, sir," and he smiled.

The name seemed familiar. It seemed as though I had heard it before quite lately.

"Tell me, sir, who is this person who is thus——"

"Only a young man," I said; "only an amateur. Yet he did one remarkably clever trick right under my nose," and I told him about the five-pound note.

"My trick, sir! my invention!" he exclaimed.

"There's only one other person who knows—or, rather, knew—that trick, and I taught it to him, and he——"

"Beef or turkey?" interrupted the steward behind.

"Beef, please. And who may this young man be?"

I described Jervise as best I could. The Professor wheeled round his chair and looked at me severely.

"Come, sir, I see you know more about me than I thought. But that is no subject for joking, I think."

"Joking?" I said; "my dear sir, I'm not joking."

He had begun eating again, and said with a mouth half-full:

"I dare say you will tell me what the young man's name is——"

"Jervise," I interrupted.

The Professor dropped his knife and fork again, with a clatter, but quickly recovered himself.

"Now I know you are making this thing up, sir. But, as I said before, you have selected rather a cruel and heartless topic.

"Of course, you have heard, for it was this very ship," and he went on eating again. "It can't be a resemblance—leaving out the similarity of name—for I have no such person on board, and I think I know the face of every soul in the ship. Memory is part of my business, sir."

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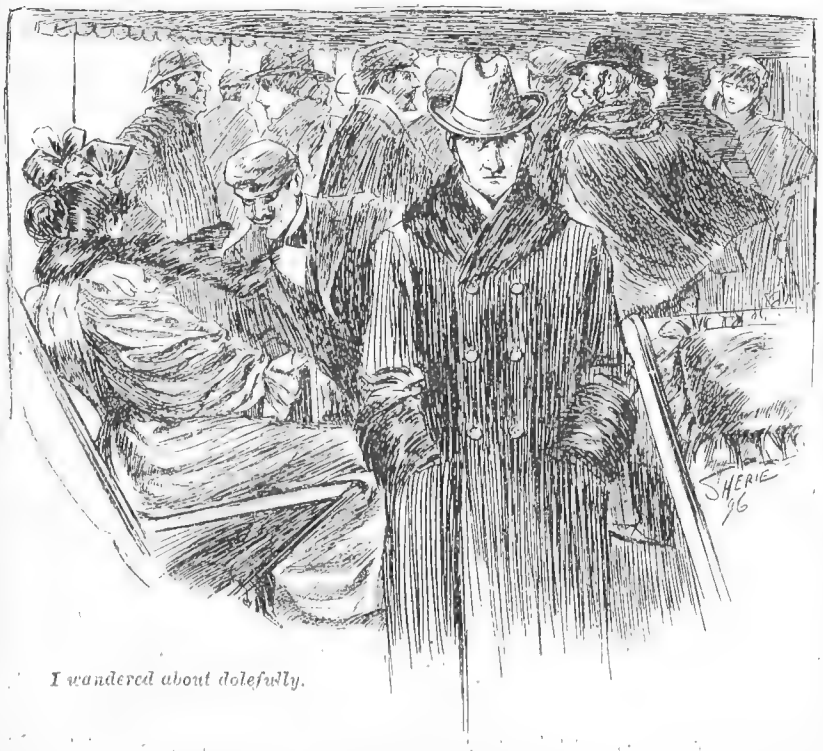
"Well, all I know is that I've been down in this man's room this morning, and saw the trick I told you of," I said, somewhat nettled at his manner and words. "I can tell you the number of the room, for I noticed it particularly, owing to the numerical sequence of the figures. It is 123."

"My room!" shouted the Professor. "Oh, ho—ho! Now I know you are humbugging. You've overdone it, sir. Suppose we drop the subject," and he gave me a withering scowl.

"Ah, captain," turning to Captain Hains, who at that moment came down and took his seat at the head of the table, "so we are now breasting the broad billows of the stormy ocean. Excuse me, sir; no more on that subject," as I made an effort to renew our conversation.

To a tender sailor like myself, the motion of the ship had become already rather trying. Annoyed at what I considered the Professor's rudeness, and feeling decidedly more uncomfortable every minute, I soon joined the small army of hasty departures from the different tables, and, postponing further talk with the Professor until we met again, went down to my berth. We had a succession of gales and storms after that and I kept my berth throughout, now and then making an effort to gain the deck, but never having one essay crowned with success.



I wandered about dolefully.

I saw nothing of either Jervise or Kimball. I took it for granted they were both ill, like myself, especially the former, for I didn't expect the latter, even if well, would get over his huff soon. I didn't trouble my head much about the Professor's remarkable behaviour at the luncheon table. It was some mistake of his exaggerated into a mountain by his vanity and annoyance at having anyone trespass on what he considered his exclusive preserves. During and after a week's *régime* of *mal de mer* one doesn't trouble oneself much about anything. I could hear nothing of either of the two men from my steward, whose "beat" didn't extend to the forward cabins.

My first appearance on deck, or indeed at a meal, was on the morning we got into New York for the first time, "weather permitting." It was clear and cold, and the sea smoothing down every minute as we approached Sandy Hook, and as I went up on deck I experienced that feeling which I dare say many another ocean traveller has felt after a long term below—viz., a sense of strangeness, as though I had just come on board.

No one seemed to know me or recognise me. I looked about for Jervise and Kimball, but could see neither. I knew no one I could ask about them, so I wandered about dolefully while everyone round me stood or sat in cliques and sets, laughing and joking in high spirits at the thoughts of landing. At length the luncheon-gong sounded for the last time, and in the hope that I might find the Professor, more than through any desire to eat, I went down to the table. Yes, there he sat, chatting away like old friends with everyone within his reach. It was some minutes before he noticed me.

"Well, I declare," he said, with his hands up in feigned surprise; "your face seems familiar. Ah, yes; you are the gentleman who used to sit next to me. Mr. Robinson, I believe. Glad to see you back again, sir, though it is but for one meal."

I bowed and thanked him, though inwardly vexed at his quizzing, which had brought the notice of a dozen grinning faces upon me. I wanted to get on the old subject, too, and didn't exactly know how. I didn't like to leave myself open to what he might choose to say before all these people, in whose eyes I had already assumed the preliminary proportions of a butt. At last, just as the Professor rolled up his napkin and drank a glass of ice-water, I ventured to remark to him:

"Oh, by-the-bye, Professor, have you discovered Jervise yet?"

He turned pale, and his lips and cheeks swelled out with the suppressed anger that glittered beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"Not another word, sir, on that subject," and he brought his fist down on the table with a thump. "I won't have it, sir. If you wish to talk to me you must choose some other."

He rose and strode away. I felt like a fool; not only on account of the direct shutting-up, but because so many people had seen it and were still exchanging glances. I left the table as soon as I could.

Everyone who has crossed the ocean knows what the turmoil and bustle are as the steamer makes her way up New York harbour. The noise, the confusion, the tipping of stewards, the collection of one's traps, and the interchange of good-byes among people who had in a

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week grown to know each other better than twenty years' acquaintance on shore would have enabled them to do—all, everything forbade my ascertaining anything more, from either observation or inquiry. Besides, my own business demanded my earliest departure for Washington, and to the achievement of that end I devoted my attention exclusively.

One thing: I saw no more of Jervise. I had thought of running down to his cabin, but feared to encounter the Professor, whose cabin I concluded must be near by. So I got ashore and through the custom-house as fast as I could, and within two hours was sitting comfortably in a Pullman, whirling down over the Baltimore and Ohio to Washington.

I had been there a fortnight, and, having fulfilled the mission upon which I had been sent, was only waiting for letters I expected from home before I took my departure. The English mail arrived, and among other letters was one from my wife, inclosing a blue enveloped one with "On Her Majesty's Service" on it.

Thinking it was only some formal notification from the Foreign Office, I was about to put it back in my wife's letter, when my eye caught, "Returned Letter," I opened it. Inside was a plain white envelope with the Cunard Company's coat-of-arms embossed on the flap. On the back was neither address nor stamp, though the postmark was "Queenstown, Dec. 6." What could it mean? I was puzzled. The envelope had, of course, been opened at the Returned Letter Office to find my name and address. I took out the contents.

It was my letter which I had posted at Queenstown with the five-pound note. But deuce the bit of a five-pound note was there in it. Instead was a polite missive from the chief clerk, whose ironical tone rather spoiled its official civility, advising me in future to "put whatever money I might wish to send by post *in* the envelope, which should be addressed, and stamped, and registered, in order to insure its safe arrival at its destination."

Here was a pretty state of affairs. For a moment I was in a safe state of perplexity bordering on coma. But I pulled myself together, and tried to unravel it all. Yes, there was the letter, and Marshall and Snelgrove's bill, and there was the envelope I had put them into. But where was the address I had written, the stamp I had stuck on, and the five-pound note I had inclosed? All three were gone—gone!

At first I suspected the post-office people. But suspicion vanished into thin air as I thought about it. They couldn't have removed the writing, which had been written with an indelible pencil (what a mockery that word seemed!) or taken off the stamp without showing some sign of roughness on the surface, and there was none. Then, too, there was the postmark complete. None was lacking by the removal of the stamp. Besides, what would have been the use? Why not, if they meant to steal, and did steal the money, why not have destroyed the letter altogether?

Oh, no, it was *not* the post-office people. That was clear enough. Who then? Jervise! Yes, it was another trick of his. Rather a costly trick to me. He had got possession of the note which I fancied I had put in the letter. It was a magician's pencil he had given me to write the address with—whose writing faded in a few minutes. Could there be a doubt of it? That was why he had kept out of my way afterwards, and what the Professor meant——"What? Eh? By Jove!" I shouted. "I believe the Professor knew more about it than he let on. I bet he and Jervise are confederates. Of course, that is why he wouldn't talk about him. What a fool I have been! But how can I trace them? There's the rub?" I remembered the Professor telling me he was going to give a series of entertainments in the States. "Of course, he'll begin in New York—everybody does—and is there now."

I put on my hat and hurried down to the reading-room of the hotel to have a look at the *New York Herald*. Yes, there it was at the top of the second column of "Amusements."

NIBLO'S.
Every Evening at Eight o'Clock.

Professor de Ville
in his
Marvellous Mysteries
and
Mysterious Marvels.

That night I arrived in New York and put up at the Metropolitan Hotel, which I knew joined Niblo's Theatre, and that the Professor was going on, so I went in for a few minutes to make sure it was the same man. It was. How angry I felt. I could have fired fifty thousand blunderbusses loaded with watches, eggs, and ladies' gloves full at him, instead of the one that was exploded in the air by a weak-kneed youth who had gone on the stage to see that all was fair. But I had decided it wouldn't do to show temper. I had no proof whatever that the Professor had anything to do with the theft, no matter what I thought, and the surest way of getting my five-pound note back was to make friends with him.

To have a look at the New York Herald.

At last the performance was over. I gave the Professor a quarter of an hour to get to his room, and then sent up my card. I was told to walk up. He received me most kindly, without a shade of the trepidation I had expected him to show when I made my appearance.

"Sit down, my dear sir," he said, shaking my hand warmly, "and join me in a bottle of champagne. It is a real pleasure to meet you again." I thought how we had parted, and wondered if this were not consummate acting on the part of a man whose nerves his business required to be made of adamant. He produced some excellent cigars, and we sat smoking and drinking, and talking of every subject under the sun but the one I most wished to discuss. How to manage it I knew not. The more I put it off the harder it seemed. I hated, too, to spoil the harmony of our most pleasant interview by attempting to introduce the forbidden topic. He had seen much of the world, and warmed by the wine, interesting experiences and amusing anecdotes followed one another from his lips until the clock struck two.

"I had no idea it was so late," I said, rising to go in a

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sort of despair at my lack of moral courage in not yet having spoken of what I had come purposely to speak. "The time has so flown in your most delightful society."

The Professor smiled and bowed.

"You flatter me, sir," he said, and took my proffered hand absently.

"Now or never," thought I, "Pro——" I began, but got no farther. He had begun to speak before me.

"Mr. Robinson, I feel that I owe to you an apology for my rudeness to you at luncheon on board the *Gallia* that last day. I would have written to you, but I knew not your address. Allow me to make my apologies now."

I soon found a chance to tell him the circumstances of the loss of my bank-note as I have told them to you. He listened attentively, and throughout the narration his face exhibited many different and conflicting emotions. He spoke no word until I had finished with: "Do you think you can explain it, Professor, and help me to get back the note?"

"To the first part of your question, I answer—yes, most undoubtedly; to the second—possibly. It is now some fifteen years since I first met Philip Jervise. He was barely eighteen then."

"Fifteen and eighteen are thirty-three. Surely he can't be so old as that?"

"Be good enough not to interrupt me. I think I ought to know. I remember, I thought him too young to be my assistant, for which I had engaged him. But he soon proved himself to be the quickest, sharpest, cleverest assistant I had ever had, and in a few years he had become almost as adroit as myself—pardon the conceit. He went with me everywhere—St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, Madrid, Paris, London—and much of my great success in those cities, which won for me this red ribbon, was owing to the admirable manner in which he aided me without seeming to do so. You have no idea, sir, how much depends on one's assistant. I naturally grew very much attached to him, and hoped in time to see him succeed me when I retired.

"Well, I was offered inducements to come to America. I accepted them. Would that I had never come! I might still have had Philip with me! In December, '79—just one year ago—we took our passage for New York, by another strange coincidence you will think, aboard the *Gallia*. She was the crack boat of the line then, and Commodore Cook commanded her. We had wonderfully fair weather until within two days of Sandy Hook, and then got into a regular twister—a cyclone, which lasted thirty-six hours. Every one was advised to keep below. Some did, others didn't. Among those whom you couldn't keep off the deck was Jervise. He would sneak up after I had gone to bed. On one of these occasions, sir, the ship was struck by a tremendous sea, which swept her decks fore and aft from stem to stern. Jervise was standing just abreast the port side-light tower when the sea struck her—so the second officer, who was on the bridge, told us—but was never seen again."

The Professor covered his face with both hands, and leant forward with his elbows on his knees.

"And—and—do you mean to say," I gasped, "that Jervise was drowned?"

"I do," answered the Professor in a voice much broken by emotion. "The ship was searched from end to end, but no vestige of him was found."

"You astonish me!" I exclaimed; "it seems almost past belief."

"It is quite true," said the Professor, slowly recovering his self-possession. "Excuse this exhibition of

It was my five-pound note!

feeling, pray; I'm all right now. And now, as to the recovery of the note. It must be somewhere, for it is clear he cannot have taken it with him, and——"

"But may he not have burned it by mistake?" I suggested.

The Professor shook his head. "No fear of that, sir. He never made a mistake. But stay; I have a sort of inspiration. You say he drew the note you sent in the letter from the pocket of your waistcoat? Have you that waistcoat now?"

"It is the one I have on now," I said; "I always travel in this suit."

"Well, it's only an idea of mine; but suppose you feel in the pocket now?"

Incredulous, but wishing to please him, I thrust my finger and thumb into the pocket. They touched something; it felt like folded paper, crisp and tough. I drew it out and unfolded it. It was my five-pound note! To assure myself, with heart beating fast against my ribs, I looked in my pocket-book at the number. It was the same—76-1, 28396.

But you may ask: What was to prevent the Professor from getting the note into my pocket by sleight of hand if he was such an adept at it, when he found I might make trouble about it, and from inventing the tale about Jervise being swept overboard and drowned? I'll admit I had those doubts myself. So to satisfy myself, when the *Britannic* landed me in Liverpool, nine days later, I went to the Cunard office, in Water Street, and found—first, that the number of the Professor's *room* was 123; second, that no such person as Jervise had taken passage on the steamer; and third, that the 1879 log of the *Gallia*, deposited in the office, and which they were most polite in overhauling for me, had this entry: *Dec.* 18. *Lat.* 50.32 *N.*; *Lon.* 40.23 *W. Saloon passenger: Philip Jervise, aged* 32; *occupation, Wizard's assistant; lost overboard.*

James Lucellf.

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My only Engagement

BECAUSE I couldn't help it. There! Do you suppose I wanted to be an old maid? Do you suppose I prefer grey cats, green tea, and knitting work to a good-looking husband? I'd like to know what you take me for!

I'm resigned—but I wasn't always so. I was nearly being engaged once, and once I was all but married. I'll tell you about it—in confidence, of course!

He was a fat, jovial, middle-aged widower, with two daughters, and the handsomest whiskers I ever saw, and the delicious, insinuating way he had of bending down his head close to mine, and saying in a half whisper: "How do you do, Miss Hetty?" was beyond all description.

He didn't positively come to see me very often but he was always stopping at our gate (his father's joined ours), and having nice little chats, and strolling home from singing lessons with me.

One evening he dropped in about dusk. I heard him rubbing his boots on the doormat, as I sat at work in the front window.

"Come in, Dutton, and have a pipe," says my father, as hospitable as could be.

"No, thank'ee," says he, "I've called to see Miss Hetty!"

"Oh," says my father, with a little chuckle, "that's it, hey? Well, you'll find her in the drawing-room."

I worked away, making believe not to hear his step until he was close upon me. And then started, and cried: "Dear me!" and dropped my thimble, in the most natural way in the world.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Hetty," says Dutton.

"I'll try not to be, sir," I answered.

"Now what do you suppose I'm going to say to you, my dear?" says he.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," says I, hanging down my head.

"I've been thinking, this long while, Miss Hetty, that you were fitted to adorn another sphere than that you so admirably occupy here!"

I didn't make any answer, but I eventually resolved that when we were married I'd have a wing added to the south end of the Dutton house—the dining-room always was too small—and I'd have new crimson curtains, instead of the faded old green hangings, and that the old hemlock tree should be cut down as quick as axe could level it.

All these ideas shot through my brain in less than a minute, when I sat and listened with my eyes intently fixed on the hem of my dress.

"Do you suppose," he went on, "you could be induced to leave your home here, and your kind, indulgent father? I know it's asking a great deal of you, Miss Hetty."

"Yes," I faltered, "but ——"

"But the little bird must leave the home-nest some time," he said laughingly, "and if you would accept the offer I have to make you——"

Little as I was experienced in such matters, I felt that the time was come to speak.

"Can you doubt it?" I asked, trying hard to blush, but with a painful consciousness that all my tender emotions were congregating rosily, as usual, in the end of my nose.

"Then it is yes?"

"Of course it is yes," I said archly.

"You are fond of children? My two girls will be among the claimants for your time and affection."

"They shall be daughters to me," I answered with enthusiasm.

"And what time could you——"

"At any time you please to name."

"Ahem—yes—the first week in September would, I suppose, be preferable."

"I will be ready then," I faltered.

"And I will ascertain the particulars, and let you know as early as possible. I told the trustees I thought you could be persuaded to accept the position."

"What trustees?"

"The trustees of the St. Genevian Seminary. The position of which I speak is that of English teacher."

I dropped my work-basket with a crash. Teacher in the St. Genevian Seminary, when I had all the time imagined myself to be sought in marriage. Oh, my countrywomen, what a fall was here! And there sat Dutton, as complacent and smiling as ever. "You see," he pursued the hateful topic. "I have a very special reason for wishing to send my daughters to boarding-school just now; I don't mind telling you, in confidence, my dear Miss Hetty, that I am contemplating a speedy marriage with Lucy Hooper."

Lucy Hooper, indeed! A pink-faced little girl of eighteen who knew no more about housekeeping than I did about verbs. Lucy Hooper!

"And," went on the absurd old widower, smirking like a lover of twenty-one, "I should like to feel that your improving influence was brought to bear upon my dear girls, for Malvina is a little inclined to be sullen, and Sarah Jane——"

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"Yes, I know," I interrupted, with an impatient little toss of my head, "but I don't like teaching!"

"Don't like teaching! Why, I thought——"

"I can't help what you thought!" I interrupted tartly. "I don't choose to accept the place."

Dutton started with eyes like miniature full moons.

"My dear Miss Hetty——"

"I'm not your dear Miss Hetty!" I burst out, ready to cry with rage and indignation, "and I see no use in wasting any further words on the matter. I won't teach in the St. Genevian Seminary! And I dare say Miss Lucy Hooper is wondering why you don't go over there this fine evening."

"Am I to understand——"

"You're to understand exactly what you please!" I exclaimed, beating a retreat with my work-basket. "Good evening, Mr. Dutton."

And that was my first offer—or, at least, the first I was near having.

It was two years after that, when I was living in Madame Rocheparde's fashionable establishment—for I had got tired of the country, and wanted to enjoy a glimpse of fashionable society—that I became acquainted with Gustave Emile Dupin, the dearest, dark-eyed foreigner in the world, with a lisp, and a moustache like black silk.

"I trust that Mademoiselle has not yet her heart surrendered to other aspirants," he said, "for is it that I may hope?"

I didn't know what to say, but Gustave caught my hand in both of his.

"The charming Mademoiselle—why does she hesitate?" he ejaculated; "I am her slave, her faithful dog—the dust beneath her tiniest of tiny feet! Shall my brains explode with the pistol! for life without my Henriette's devotion were but a lengthened misery."

"Gustave, how frightfully you talk," said I, beginning to be quite terrified.

"You will, then, be mine?"

"Yes," I faltered. What else could I say?

I was engaged this time; and how the widows and maidens of Madame Rocheparde's boarding-house did envy me, to be sure. The Countess Dupin—for Gustave had hinted at a title to which he was next heir.

How delightfully it would sound, and how I should enjoy sending my wedding-cards to Lucy Hooper—I mean to Mrs. Dutton.

The wedding was fixed for the next month: it was rather a precipitate arrangement, but Gustave told me, in his pretty chivalric phrase, that he could not exist without me any longer. And I really didn't see the necessity for any more delay; so I got the dress—white silk dress—and began upon the trousseau, with two seamstresses and a machine.

It was the day before the eventful Thursday, and I was busy packing my trunk, when Gustave came in, with dishevelled hair and cravat tied all on one side.

"Dear me, Gustave, what is the matter?"

"It is that your Gustave is wretched, that he seeks but to bid his Henriette adieu ere he himself annihilates. Weep not, my angel! but forget that thy poor Gustave has ever lived."

And then, in answer to my questionings, he confessed that he had endorsed the note of a commercial friend, that the friend had failed to meet his engagements, and that he, consequently, became liable.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"But a paltry hundred pounds, and to-morrow gold will flow in upon me in streams. My arrangements are all made; I shall receive remittances to-morrow. But for to-day—alas, my Henriette! why does not heaven strike me with thunderbolts? Why do I live?"

"I can lend you a hundred pounds, Gustave!"

"My guardian angel! my queen of love! It is but for one lee-tel day, and then your Gustave will heap the treasures of all his ancestors at your feet."

I happened to have just a hundred pounds left, for my outfit had been less expensive than I had expected, and I gave it to him. He bent to kiss my hand—Dutton, in all his common-place courtship, never dreamed of kissing Lucy Hooper's hand! there wasn't the shadow of poetry in his nature.

"To-morrow!" he murmured, "to-morrow! Ah, my Henriette! Until then I count the minutes, I number the seconds."

And he went off buoyant and *débonnaire* as a Chevalier Bayard.

The wedding morning came, but no bridegroom! the mystic hour—but still no Gustave.

I was beginning to grow hysterical, when finally Madame Rocheparde hurried in, with a note bearing my betrothed's delicate caligraphy.

"My poor Mademoiselle, read that!" she cried, throwing it into my lap.

It was a communication from Gustave to Madame Rocheparde, to the effect that he had sailed for France on yesterday's steamer—that he was tired of England and the English, and sought in the more genial sunshine of his native shore a brighter career.

"As to the maid, old and ugly, to whom I am affianced," he wrote, "she has served my turn. I have spent her part of the hundred pounds to buy a passage! Did she for an instant dream that I, Gustave Emile Dupin, should squander myself on her! For her conceit and folly she is but rightly punished. Adieu, my good madame for ever, from your GUSTAVE."

That was the end of my only engagement.

R. H. L.

The Puzzle Picture.

IN last week's *Short Stories* we gave the names of 160 people who had succeeded in correctly putting together the second of the picture puzzles. The only thing to do was to divide the Ten Pound prize amongst them. After the first post and before the competition closed something like nine thousand readers had also sent in correct solutions. It was impossible to divide the sum we had set aside for consolation prizes amongst these, for the simple reason that they would only have obtained a farthing each.

Under the circumstances and in view of the immense interest taken in the picture puzzles we have set a more difficult one this week, which will be found on page 109.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 7.—Jaybird's Last Joke on Tenderfoot Smith.

"Whatever makes this yere Jaybird Bob believe he's a humourist?" said the old cattle man one afternoon as he slowly returned from a walk.

"Whatever it is misleads him to so deem himself is shorely too many for me. Doc. Peets tells him himse'f one day he's plumb wrong.

"'Your'e nacherally a sombre, morose party,' says Doc. Peets this time, 'an' nothin' jocose or jocund about you. Your disp'sition, Jaybird, don't no more run to jokes than a prairie dog's.'

"'Which I would admire to know why not?' says Jaybird Bob.

"'Well,' goes on Doc. Peets, 'you thinks too slow—too much like a cow in a swamp. Your mind moves sluggish that away, an' sorter sinks to the hocks each step. If you was born to be funny your intellect would be limber an' frivolous.'

"'Bein' all that is personal to me,' says Jaybird Bob, 'I takes leave to regard you as wrong. My jokes is good, high grade jokes, an' when you talks of me bein' morose you're barkin' at a knot.' And so Jaybird goes on a-holdin' of himse'f funny ontil we has him to bury.

"No; Jaybird ain't his sure-enough name; it's just a handle to his 'dentity, so we all picks it up handy an' easy. Jaybird's real name is Graingerford—Poindexter Graingerford. But the same is cumbrous an' unwieldersome. so when he first trails into Woodville we all considers among ourselves an' settles it's quicker to call him jest 'Jaybird Bob' that away. An' we does.

"It's on the spring round-up this Jaybird first develops that he regards himse'f witty. It's in the mornin' jest as we all has saddled up an' lines out to comb the range round about for cattle, there's a tenderfoot along whose name is Smith, an' as he's canterin' off Jaybird comes a curvin' up on his bronco and reaches over an' tails this shorthorn's pony.

"What's tailin' a pony? It's ridin' up from the rear an' takin' a half-hitch on your saddlehorn with the tail of another man's pony and then spurrin' by and swappin' ends with the whole outfit; man, hoss, an' all.

"It's really too toomultuous for a joke, an' mebby breaks the pony's neck; mebby the rider's. But whether he saves his neck or no, the party whose pony is tailed allers emerges tharfrom doshevelled an' wrought up, an' hotter than a wolf. So no one plays this yere joke much; not till he's ready to get shot at, in fact.

"As I says, this Jaybird watches Smith as he rides off. Being new on the range Smith don't ride easy. A cow saddle ain't built like these yere Eastern hulle, nohow. The stirrup is set two inches further back, for one thing, an' it's compiled a heap different other ways. Bein' onused to cow saddles, an' for that matter cow ponies, this Smith lops over for'ard an' beats with his elbows like he's a curlew or some thing flyin', an' I reckons' it's sech proceedin's makes Jaybird allow he's goin' to be funny an' tail Smith's pony.

"As I explains, he capers along after Smith an' reaches over an' gets a handful of the pony's tail; an' then. wroppin' it around his saddlehorn, he goes by on the jump an' spreads Smith an' his bronco promisc'us about the scene. This yere Smith goes along the grass on all-fours, like a jack-rabbit.

"Which Smith, I reckons, is the maddest and hostilest man in Southern Arizona. Before ever he offers to get up, he lugs out his six-shooter an' makes some mighty sincere efforts like, he aims to shoot up Jaybird. But he's slow with his weapon, bein' spraddled out on the grass that away, an' it gives Dave Tutt an' Enright an' some more of us a chance to jump in between an' stop the deal.

"We all picks Smith up an' rounds up his pony—which scrambles to his feet after bein' tailed an' is now cavortin' about likes its mind is overturned—an' explains to him this yere is a joke. But he is moody an' relentless about it; an' it don't take no hawk to see he don't like it nor forgive Jaybird Bob a little bit.

"'Tailin' a gent's pony,' says this Smith, 'is no doubt thrillin' amusement for folks lookin' on, but thar's nothin' of a redeemin' nature from the standpoint of the party whose pony's upheaved that away. Not to be misunderstood at this p'int,' goes on this Smith, 'I want to announce that from now for'ard life will have but one purpose with me, which'll be to down the next gent who ever tails a pony of mine. The present incident goes as a jest. but you can gamble the next won't be so regarded.'

"That sorter ends the talk, an' all of us but the cook an' the horse-hustlers bein' in the saddle by now, we disperse ourselves through the country to work in the cattle, an' proceed with the round-up we're on. We can see, though, that tailin' Smith's pony is not to be attempted again with safety.

"It's when we all rides away that Doc. Peets—who's out with the round-up, though he ain't got no cattle to brand himse'f—tells Jaybird he's not a humourist, like I already repeats.

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"But, as I suggests, this Jaybird Bob can't believe it none. He's mighty sure his jokes is excellent good jokes, an' while it's plain Smith ain't got no confidence in him, an' distrusts him complete since he tips over his bronco that mornin', it looks like Jaybird can't let him alone. An' these misdeeds of Jaybird's keeps goin' on ontil by the nearest mistake—for it's sure an accident if ever one happens in the cow country—this yere tenderfoot shoots Jaybird an' kill's him for good.

"It looks afterward to us like it's a speshul providence to warn folks not to go projectin' about engaged in what you might call physical jokes. Still, this yere removal of Jaybird didn't take place till mighty near the close of the round up; an' intervenin' he's goin' round stockin' the cards an' settin' up hands on the pore shorthorn continuous.

"One of Jaybird's jokes, 'one of his best,' Jaybird calls it, results in stampedin' the herd of cattle we was bringin' along at the time—bein' all cows an' their calves—to a brandin' pen. Which thar's 2,000, big an' little, in the bunch; an' Jaybird's humour puts 'em to flight like so many snowbirds, an' it takes two days hard ridin' for the whole outfit to bring 'em together agin'.

"Among other weaknesses this Smith imports from the States is, he's afraid of snakes. Rattlesnakes is his abhorrence; an' if each is a disembodied spirit he couldn't want 'em further off. He's allers alarmed that mebby, somehow a rattlesnake will come pokin' in under his blankets nights; an' camp with him while he's asleep. An' this yere wretched Jaybird fosters these delusions.

"'About them serpents,' I overhears Jaybird say to him one evenin' while we're settin' round, all but Moore an' Tut who's riding herd, ''bout them serpents; a gent can't be too particular. It look like they has but one hope, which is to crawl into a gent's blankets an' sleep with him. An' if he moves or turns over, they simply gives a buzz an' grabs him. I knows of forty folks who's bit that away by snakes, an' nary a one lives to explain the game.'

"'Be rattlesnakes thick in Arizona?' I hears Smith say to this Jaybird.

"'Be they thick?' answers Jaybird, 'Well, I shore wishes I had whiskey for all the rattlesnakes thar is yereabouts. I don't want to go overstatin' the census to a gent who is out playin' for information, an' who's learnin' fast, but I s'pose now thar ain't none less than a billion snakes in Southern Arizona alone. If I could saw off the little passel of cattle I has on this range, you can gamble I'd pull my freight to-morry. It's all right for such old Cimmarons as Enright an' sech parties as that sawbones Peets to go bluffin' about their bein' no rattlesnakes to speak of; an' that they couldn't p'ison you to death nowhow; but you bet I ain't seen forty of my nearest friends die of snake bites an' not learn nothin'. An' almost every time it's a rattlesnake as comes slidin' into bed with 'em while they're locked in dreams, an' who gets hot an' goes to chewin' of 'em, jest because they want to turn out before the snake does. Rattlesnakes that away wants to sleep till it's fourth drink time an' the sun's 'way up yonder. An' when a man goes to rollin' out of his blankets say at sun-up, it makes 'em monstrous angry to be disturbed; an' the first he knows of where they be an' how they looks on early risin', their teeth's in him up to the guard, an' before night there's one man the less to cook for, an' an extra saddle rides along in the grub waggon with the blankets when they moves camp.'

"Of course, all this is a heap of impressive to this Smith; an' while Enright an' Peets both tells him this Jaybird's havin' fun with him, you can see he's mortal afraid every night when he spreads his blankets, an' he makes a circle about where he sleeps with a horsehair lariat he's got from a Mexican; an' who tells him it will tickle the snakes' necks when they goes to crawl across it, an' makes 'em keep away.

"The way this Jaybird manages to stampede that time is this away; Jaybird comes ridin' in from the cattle about three hours before sun-up to turn out Tutt, who is due to take his place on herd. Jaybird's got a rawhide rope he's been draggin' about in the grass which makes it damp an' cold. As Jaybird rides up to camp he sees this Smith rolled up in his blankets snorin' to beat the band.

"Of course Jaybird's out to be joyous in a second. He rides up close to this helpless shorthorn as he lays asleep, an' throws a coil of his wet rawhide lariat across his countenance where it's turned up in the moonlight. Jest as it settles down cold an' startlin' on Smith's skin, Jaybird yells:

"'Snakes, Smith! Thar's a rattlesnake on you bigger'n a dog.'

"Jaybird says afterwards as how this Smith behaves tremendous. He boils up into the atmosphere with a yell like a wolf; an' grabbin' a blanket in each of his hands he starts out over the plains in a state of frenzy. Which the worst is he goes headlong towards the herd; an' what with them shrieks he volunteers, an' the blankets flappin' an' wavin' thar ain't a cow in the bunch who stays in her right mind a moment, but springs to her feet an' takin' her offspring along, goes surging off towards the hills for good. You couldn't turn or stop 'em then. It's the completest case of stampede I ever turns out to behold.

"No; this Smith never learns the rights of the epeesode. He's that peevish an' violent by nature no one tells him it's Jaybird, Enright stands in to cap the game himse'f; an' puts it up in confab with this Smith the next day as how he sees the rattlesnake, an' that it's mighty near the size of a roll of blankets.

"'It was shore,' says Enright when he an' Smith is conversin' thereon, 'the most giant serpent I ever sees without the aid of liquor. An' when he goes streakin' off into the gloom, bein' amazed an' rattled by your cries, he leaves so far as I am concerned a trail of relief behind. You can gamble, I wasn't interruptin' of no sech snake; nor makin' of no pretext for his detention.'

"'What for was his rattles like?' says Smith; an' he gets pale at the mere sound of Enright's talk.

"'As to his rattle,' says Enright, like he's thoughtfully tryin' to recall 'em to his mind, ''as far this reptile's rattles; it was that dark that while I sees 'em I couldn't but jest say. So far as I notes anything they looks like a belt full of cartridges; sorter corrugated an' numerous.'

"Now this yere which I relates, while no doubt burnin' experiences to Smith, is after all harmless enough. An' to people not careful about the basis of their glee it might do some to laugh at. But it all closes upon a play, with nothin' gay nor merry in it; leastwise, not for Jaybird Bob.

"This yere finish joke of Jaybird's transpires one evenin' just as the cook's startin' in to rustle us some chuck. The grub waggon's been stopped in the mouth of what's called Peeled Pine cañon. Every man's in the camp but this yere tenderfoot Smith. Enright, who's actin' as round-up boss for the outfit—for everybody's cattle bein' worked in younison, that away, like we allers does—has sent Smith peerin' round for cattle, way off up the long deep valley into which the Peeled Pine cañon

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opens. This shorthorn's due to be back any time now. 'cause it's only a question of how far up the valley does he go. He don't run no show to be lost, for nothin' less aerial than a goat could climb out of the cañon he's in, an' tharfore he's bound to find our camp.

"Of course, knowin' every man's station in the day's ridin', we're plenty aware that this tenderfoot Smith is some'ers above us in the valley. None of the rest of us is turnin' our minds to him probably, except Jaybird Bob. All of a bump like a buckin' pony it strikes Jaybird that he's missin' a onusual chance to be buoyant.

"'What for a play would it be,' says Jaybird, rousin' up from where he lay watchin' of the cook slice salt hoss for fryin'. 'What for a game would it be,' says he, 'for a passel of us to lay up the draw, an' bushwhack this ontaught person Smith as he comes ridin' down to camp? We all could hop out at him, a-whoopin' an' shootin' an' bein' all of us wropped up in blankets, he'll allow it's shore Injuns an' go plumb locoed.'

"'You'll kep harrowin' away at this yere Smith party, Jaybird,' says Enright, 'ontil you arises from the game loser. Now I don't reckon none I'd play Apaché, if I was you. Thar's too much effort in bein' an Apaché, that way. I'd lay yere an' think up some joke which don't demand so much industry, an' ain't calc'lated to scare an innocent chap to death.'

"But Jaybird won't listen. He falls into admiration of his scheme, and at last Tutt an' Jack Moore allows they'll go along an' play there aborigines with Jaybird an' note how the tenderfoot stands the racket.

"'As long as this Jaybird's bound to make the play,' says Jack Moore to Enright, talkin' to one side, 'it's a heap better to have the conservative element represented in the deal. So I puts it up, it's a good sage move for me an' Tutt to stand in. We all will come handy to pull Jaybird an' this Shorthorn apart if they get their horns locked in the cause of these witticisms.'

"Enright takes the same view; so Jaybird an' Moore. an' Tutt goes off up the cañon a mile, an' lays in wait surreptitious to head off Smith. Moore tells me the story when he an' Tutt comes ridin' back with the corpse.

"'This is how we does,' says Moore. 'Me an' Tutt, an' deceased—which last is Jaybird all right enough—is ensconced in a bunch of oak bushes, an' behind a p'int of rocks. Jaybird's got his blanket 'round him so he looks like an Injun. It ain't long when we hears the tenderfoot comin' down the cañon: it's likely he's half a mile away.

"'He's runnin' in on to us at a road gait, an' when he's about two hundred yards off, Jaybird turns out a yell to make you shiver; shakes a load or two outen his gun; goes surgin' out from around the p'int of rocks, an' charges straight at this unthinkin' tenderfoot. It is due to trooth to say me an' Tutt follows this Jaybird's suit; only not so violent as to whoops.

"'Does it scare this tenderfoot? Well, it shorely alarms him some. He takes Jaybird for a savage an' makes no question; which the same is no wise strange; I'd took him for a savage myse'f, only bein' in at the deal that away I know it's Jaybird. So as I remarks it horrified the tenderfoot no end, an' at the first sight of Jaybird he whirls his pony an' goes back up that valley like an antelope.

"'Nacherally we all follows; Jaybird leadin' a whoopin' an' a shootin' an' throwin' no end of sperit into it. It is a success, this piece of wit is up to this p'int, an' Jaybird puts a heap of zest into it.

"'The weak spot in this piece of humour is because of the ideas this tenderfoot's been gainin' an' the improvements he's been makin' while straggling about in our company. I onhesitatingly states that if this yere joke had been pulled off by Jaybird when this gent Smith first enters our midst it would have been the victory of his life, an' somethin' to be proud of. But Jaybird defers it too long. This tenderfoot has acquired a few Western ways, jest enough to sp'le the fun, an' send poor Jaybird a-curvin' to his home on 'igh.

"'This is what the shorthorn does which teaches me he's learnin'. While he's humpin' off up the cañon fit to distance a storm-wind; an' me an' Jaybird an' Tutt is stampedin' along in pursoot, the fugitive onlimbers his six-shooter an' without even turnin' his head, or lookin' back at us, he onhooks the entire bundle of lead our way.

"'Which the worst feature of it is, this backhanded blind shottin' is a success. The very first shot gets Jaybird plumb the head, an' he goes off his pony without mentionin' a thing about it to either Tutt or me.

"'That's all thar is to report. Dave an' me pull up our broncos, abandons the joke at this crisis, lay Jaybird across his saddle like a sack of corn, an' returns to state the case.'

"'Whatever did you all do with the frightened stranger?' asks Enright.

"'Which we never does nothin',' says Moore. 'The last I sees of him, he's flying up the valley, hittin' nothin' but the high places. An' assoomin' his project's to get away he's succeedin' admirable. As he vanishes I should jedge from his motions he's reloadin' his gun; an' from the luck he has with Jaybird, Tutt an' me is led to believe that's no real object in followin' him further. I don't press my society on nobody; shorely not on some locoed tenderfoot who's pulled his gun, an' is blazin' away erratic, without purpose of aim.'

"'Don't you an' Tutt know where he is at all?' demands Enright.

"'Which we shorely don't,' says Moore. 'If his horse holds out an' he don't swerve none he's p'intin' out in when he fades from view, he's goin' to be over in the San Simon country by to-morry mornin' when we eats our grub; an' that's half-way to the Borax desert. If you wants my impressions,' conclooded Moore, 'drawn from a-seein' his depart, I'm free to say I don't reckon you're goin' to see this tenderfoot soon.'

"An' that's about the size of it, Moore jest about calls the turn. Jaybird's last joke scares this tenderfoot Smith plumb out of Arizona; an' that ain't one of us ever sees hair, hide, horn nor hoof-mark of him no more. An' he takes with him, this Smith does, the best pony in our bunch."

☞ ON OPPOSITE PAGE is shown on a reduced scale the beautiful design for the cover of the New Musical Magazine. The first number will be issued on February 29th for March 1st. "MELODY" will consist of 48 pages of vocal and instrumental music by the best and most popular composers, and will be printed on stout paper, music size. Price Sixpence nett. It will appear monthly. Please ask your newsagent to order a copy for you.

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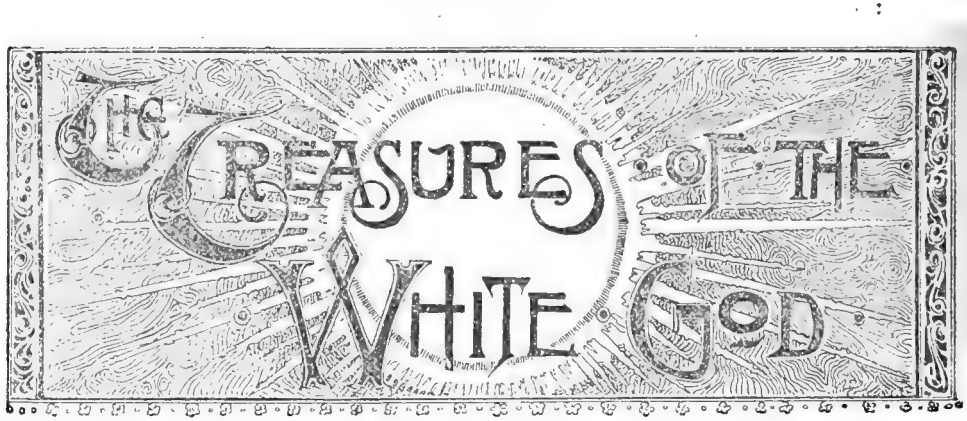

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Something Tangible!

Forgery—flight!

Those two words were the theme, the burden, the essence of all Richard Sheldon's thoughts, as, one week after the discovery of the White God as an empty god, he sat at his desk in the library and bent his head on his hands, hollow-eyed, pale-faced, haunted with dread, rage and disappointment.

They had been tricked, cheated, baulked! Once the crushing, appalling dismay of their discovery had passed, and they found only the impress of stored treasure inside the idol—not a particle of the treasure itself—they examined it more closely. The cutaway section in the back showed that recently—within months, perhaps weeks—some intelligent hand had opened it, rifled it. Whose? Was this the vaunted vengeance of the Aztec high priest, Medeiras?

It mattered not. The treasure had eluded their grasp; it was lost to them for ever more; they had been cheated of their prey, and, as the first shock of the bitter disappointment passed away, like two birds of evil omen, they looked over the field for new victims.

The White God had been presented to the Exhibition—already it was being prepared for a place in the Mexican exhibit at the famous World's Fair. The donation had been made in a depressed, half-hearted way, but the publicity given to Sheldon through the gift helped his credit, augmented his schemes; and credit and schemes were all the capital he now possessed to bank upon.

He was in a tight fix—a bad predicament, a close corner. If Golcondas went up, he was all right; but Golcondas had persisted in a contrary course. It had gone waywardly down, down, until no one would even take the stock as a present, fearing it might drag them down with it.

"It's ruin—sheer, blank ruin!" he had told Colonel Lytle desperately. "Five years of luxury and then a famine! I can't, I won't endure it! I can't go back to the crusts and the old starving life!"

"Then better it!" had sprung to Lytle's ready lips.

"How?"

"Your credit is good."

"Yes."

"Borrow all you can—use your friends to the last available limit of cash accommodation. Bulk all your operations for a near future date and then——"

"Bolt?"

"Exactly. I fancy you and I could enjoy a hundred thousand at Paris, or Baden-Baden, or in sunny Italy. Come! is it a bargain?"

"Yes."

"And I'll help you. There's nothing but beggary promised here—the Ringold fortune is lost to us. Be speedy, politic, cautious. With your eminent qualifications as a financier and your superb credit as a successful business man, even a quarter of a million wouldn't be an impossibility, and"—with a sinister smile—"when legitimate endorsements are exhausted, you are an apt penman, Sheldon!"

Forgery! Flight! That was how Richard Sheldon arrived at this conclusion—a conclusion that had serious obstacles in its way, he decided, as he sat moping at his desk that afternoon.

He looked up eagerly and relievedly as a visitor was announced—Colonel Lytle—and he greeted him gladly.

Colonel Lytle was natty, agile, neat as ever. The gleaming straw-coloured sun-stone still blazed in his snowy shirt front, but his manner was a trifle more nervous than usual; the crow's feet had deepened about his eyes, and he had the restless glance of a man easily frightened at shadows.

"Well, Dick," he spoke familiarly, and with a cheery assumption as he lit a cigar and faced his associate, "how goes it?"

"The money?"

"Yes."

"All right. In one week I shall bulk a clear hundred thousand down on the bank, discount, deposit; cheque out to you, and—"

"Slope!"

"That's it," assented Sheldon; and then mechanically he relapsed into his previous engrossed silence.

"See here, Dick!" began Lytle, after watching his companion studiously and curiously from the corner of his eyes for some time, "what's the matter with you lately?"

"Eh! me?" repeated Sheldon, with an embarrassed start.

"Yes. You are concealing some secret from me—some serious trouble."

"Well, you are right," admitted Sheldon. "Lytle, I'm frightened! Shall I tell you why? That detective we lured—"

"Dean?"

"Exactly."

"What of him?"

"He's shadowing me."

"Nonsense!"

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"No, it is no nonsense. It is the actual fact. He's been watching me for over a week past. I've caught constant sight of his figure lurking about the house here, at the office, in the street. What does it mean?"

"A new and larger bribe, to be sure!" jeered Lytle reassuringly. "He's repented his repentance. Now, don't you get flustered. Hurry up your arrangements, and let us get away before he approaches you again. He can prove nothing, only he might stumble over our new plot."

"I wish I knew the true motive of his actions," murmured Sheldon, half persuaded. "I say, Lytle, will you do me a favour?"

"Certainly."

"Get some one to watch him in turn, and keep him from getting too closely on our track."

"I will, but I think it vain trouble."

"And try and find out something tangible, Lytle!"

"Something tangible? Very good," assented Lytle graciously.

The two men parted—the merchant to decide on hastening his preparations for flight, the other to deepen the traces of care on his hard, cynical face by reflecting deeply, as he left Sheldon's house.

They were at odds, these two men; one was deceiving the other, though neither suspected it.

Richard Sheldon had other fears than fears of Detective Dean alone.

The previous night, closing the inside blinds of the library, a man skulking under the windows had glared in at him, and abruptly disappeared.

It gave him a dreadful shock, the more so as, in that momentary flash of the lurker's eyes, he seemed to go back five years, and recall the awful look of accusation and reproach dead Adrian Burgoyne had bestowed upon him as he was marched from the prisoner's dock to serve an unjust sentence at penal servitude.

How those eyes haunted him!—how they revived the past! how he seemed to discern the hand of the dead in the abstraction of the dead man's treasure! This it was that made Richard Sheldon moody and unsocial and abstracted; and he was ashamed to confess his "vagaries" even to his accomplice.

Colonel Lytle was a little better actor, but he had far more reason to dread than his ally; he had more to conceal, too.

A week previous he had made a very startling discovery. The girl, Patrice Ringold, had escaped from the charge of the woman who had been her gaoler during his sojourn in Mexico. She had, the woman said, made close inquiries about his (Lytle's) present movements and place of residence, and the woman had unsuspectingly given her the desired information. That same evening Patrice disappeared. The ensuing day a veiled female had called at his apartments, had insisted on awaiting his return, had sat in his little parlour for an hour or more, had grown weary of waiting, had departed, and the next discovery the dismayed Lytle made was that a certain valuable packet of documents concerning his dealings with Richard Sheldon was missing from a cabinet.

Could his visitor have been Patrice? Could she have been the thief? Scarcely. Once free, she would hardly venture once more within the reach of the tiger's claws. As to the papers—they might have been destroyed accidentally. All the same, he worried over all this, but he deemed it unwise to reveal the truth to his accomplice. It would distress the merchant, and Sheldon needed all his nerve for his bold financial exploits just now.

Another source of concern for Lytle was the fact that he was being "shadowed," as well as Sheldon. Twice he had caught sight of a sinister form near his home. Were the detectives on his track? For what? He laughed at the presumption. He was too clever to leave any incriminating traces of crime down the sinuous path he had trodden so triumphantly.

He went to the theatre after leaving Sheldon. He tried to forget his hopes and fears alike by mixing with the gay crowds and watching the actors, but it was a failure.

"Sheldon must hurry up his plans," he murmured as he stepped into a cab wearily, and hurried for home later that same evening. "I don't feel right. There's danger in the air. I have a presentiment of disaster. Ah! who was that?"

Who? indeed! The same lurking form that he had seen near his home two nights previous. The mysterious stranger glided past the cab, directed one glance in at the window full at Lytle's startled face, and then vanished.

But such a look! The fierce, glittering eyes seemed to reflect the basilisk glow of the yellow sun-stone; they seemed to mock, menace, devour, all at once.

"Fancy!" grated out Lytle irritably, as the cab drove on. "To imagine those eyes resembled those of the fanatic priest, Medeiras! Sheldon must get the money together, and leave here. I'm getting nervous. One good thing, I put a private inquiry agent on the trail of our trailers this afternoon. He'll report something tangible by to-morrow."

"Something tangible?" Those were Sheldon's anxious words. For "that something tangible" to allay his disordered fears the merchant sat waiting the following afternoon.

"Lytle will soon be here," he murmured; "our plans are nearly ripe; the hundred thousand will soon shape themselves."

He waited one hour, impatiently; two, in a fever of suspence; three, in an unreasoning, fault-finding rage. He might have waited till doomsday for that "something tangible" for all Colonel Lytle would ever again bring him the information he so craved!

For at No. 8, Roosevelt Mansions, Colonel Lytle's handsome bachelor apartments, the shades had not been raised, although it was afternoon, and the handsome ormulu lamp burnt brightly, although the sun blazed fiercely without.

The long shadows began to fall, they groped over the blank wall below the closed windows; they tried to creep through the blinds, tightly shut.

Baffled, they sank lower to the court below, giving up a task that needed the aid of light, not of darkness.

For, lying across the costly Wilton carpet, his blank face reflecting the delicate hues of the luxurious draperies, his eyes staring fixedly at the gold-fretted ceiling, was stretched the owner of all this magnificence.

The eye of straw flame that blazed in his immaculate shirt-front the evening previous, so like the eye of the lurker who had haunted his footsteps near the theatre, was no longer in place. Instead, an ugly rent showed, as if the sun-stone jewel of the White God had been forcibly wrenched from its sacrilegious possessor.

That white shirt-front bore a new object of contrast now—a red-dabbled blur, and above it was a curiously-carved knife-handle, bearing the Aztec word—"Medeiras!"

And there he lay at rest!—at rest so perfect for lip and brow, that only the judgment trump would ever awaken him—Colonel Lytle, aged forty-seven, stabbed to the heart by an unknown assassin—*or avenger!*

And by his side, tracing weird outlines on the costly carpet, dabbling the fluffy rugs, dashing the marble-tiled fireplace with fantastic splatters, was——

"Something tangible!"—*blood!*

CHAPTER XXIX.

Resurgam!

The Sunday succeeding the return of the £2,000 to Richard Sheldon, Mr. Detective Dean went to church—the first time in ten years. Thereafter he began to read his Bible morning and night.

He was a changed man. What he had undertaken,

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through the promptings of remorse, as a penance, now became a sacred duty—a calm, satisfying obligation. He began to feel more manly and energetic. He had done a great wrong; he intended to right it, so far as lay within his power.

Dean had a basis to proceed on. From the overheard conversation between the two plotters in the library of Sheldon's house, he realised that they had undertaken some great theft, and had been baffled in their efforts. Furthermore, he knew that they were plotters, in possession of property wrongfully wrested from others. But how to prove that? All this would come out later. He was more anxious to prove the innocence of Convict 407 than settle the question of the guilt of Richard Sheldon and his confederate, Colonel Lytle. The one would hinge on the other.

Convict 407, Adrian Burgoyne, was alive. Not for a moment did he doubt that fact. The tablet bearing those soul-harrowing words, "Murdered by the law," had been written by Adrian Burgoyne. He knew the handwriting perfectly. The mock tombstone had received its startling epitaph nearly a week after his supposed death.

Where, then, was the man he sought?

Not a clue, not a trace, could be gleaned from the most persistent investigation and search, and, for want of some progress more satisfactory, Dean set himself to watching Richard Sheldon.

Upon the evening of the day that witnessed the last interview between Colonel Lytle and Sheldon, the detective was shadowing the merchant's house. He saw Lytle come out and go down the street. Sheltered by a tree, he saw, too, the anxious Sheldon seated, writing, in the library. And then, of a sudden, every professional instinct of caution and shrewdness was aroused to the keenest exercise, as he saw a form cross the little garden plot of the house, linger in the shadow of a bush, survey the merchant critically, and glide furtively to the street.

"Someone else on the trail!" ejaculated Dean, startled. "It's no department man. I never saw that face before, but —oh! impossible! impossible! and yet——"

What was it in the straight, athletic form, in the graceful, steady poise of the man who had just left the precincts of Richard Sheldon's home, that carried Berwyn Dean's mind back to the scene at the Exhibition grounds, to Dormitory D, to the mad dash for liberty, to the personality that had filled his thoughts, to the exclusion of all other themes, for a week past?

There was a motive for Adrian Burgoyne's shadowing of Richard Sheldon. They were enemies. The one was the victim of the other. It was an erratic venture to deem the prowler the escaped convict, but that idea took entire and forcible possession of the mind of the officer, and, as the lurker started down the street, he started after him.

The object of his attention led him quite a long and a brisk chase. When he halted, finally, it was at a second-rate hotel in a retired street. This the man entered, secured a key at the clerk's desk, and ascended the stairs to his room.

Two trifling occurences had intensified Dean's eagerness, as he followed the lurker. He noticed a barely observable halt in one foot—a last, lingering memento of the penitentiary lock-step, which hangs to a convict for years after his release. The man he had pursued had certainly, at some time or other in his life, "done time" in a prison.

Again, as the latter opened the door of the hotel he had held it to allow a man to pass, and he held it just in the manner a convict would in the prison, when according to custom, he stood ready to be locked into his cell.

Dean had also entered the lobby of the hotel, and safe among the idlers there, eagerly watched every movement of the man he was shadowing. He kept his eye on the black figure-checks which sprang up into place as the key was removed, and, approaching the desk as the other disappeared, he observed that it was "47"—corresponding to the room occupied by the possessor of the key.

"The gentleman in number forty-seven?" he spoke carelessly, to the clerk.

"Yes."

"Is not his name Brown?"

"No, Warren. Let me see—E. G. Warren; no, here it is —R. E. Warren. Know him?"

"Fancy I do," returned Dean, and then, with wild eagerness he inspected the name which the clerk had indicated on the hotel visitors' book.

"*It's him!*" fairly panted the excited Dean.

Yes; no need to guess, or theorise, or investigate further. The man he had followed from Richard Sheldon's home was no other, could be no other, than Convict 407, Adrian Burgoyne!

For, R. E. Warren or any other fictitious name, the handwriting was unmistakably that of Adrian Burgoyne—unmistakably, too, the same as that contained upon the pencilled mock tombstone now reposing in the officer's inner pocket.

Detective Dean had found his man. It augured well as a recompense for his honest endeavour. His heart warmed to genuine joy. He was up the stairs in a twinkling, and at the door of room 47.

Tap—tap—tap!

"Come in!"

The detective turned the knob. He crossed the threshold, pushed the door shut again, and, leaning against it, looked fixedly at the single occupant of the apartment.

A barely perceptible quiver crossed the form of the other. Then, rigid as marble, posed to studied dignity and steadiness, he said coldly:

"What do you want?"

"*You!*"

The detective stretched forth a hand impressively.

"You, Adrian Burgoyne, Convict 407," he said rapidly. "You know me—Detective Dean? But not as a prisoner, a fugitive from justice—but I want you, Adrian Burgoyne!"

The other came straight up to him. Straight into the detective's eyes he looked, never quailing, never moving a muscle of his face.

"Mr. Detective Dean," he said calmly, "you call me Adrian Burgoyne. You call me Convict 407. Prove it!"

Almost in vindictive triumph, he stood there to afford the other a full view of his face. Prove it, indeed! The detective realised the extraordinary change in this man's personnel since last he had seen him, and comprehended the full integrity of that bold challenge.

"I do not wish to prove it," he announced simply. "On the contrary, I wish to aid you in hiding, in keeping your new identity a secret, because——"

He paused. The other had regarded his utterances with amazement.

"If I wished to prove it to my own satisfaction, however," continued the officer, on a new line of thought, "I would simply consult *this!*" Dean, as he spoke, drew forth the mock wooden tombstone.

Overwhelmed, the other fell back. From the very grave the dead past had arisen to confront him.

CHAPTER XXX.

On the Trail.

"Murdered!"

A cold horror seized the heart of Richard Sheldon, and its icy fingers seemed searching for his own vitals, as he learnt, for the first time, the reason why Colonel Lytle had not brought him that tangible information he had desired.

The intelligence was awarded him by a low-browed man of shabby garb and shifting eyes, who answered to the name of Davenant, and who appeared at the home of the merchant at dusk, the day after the tragedy.

"I was employed by Colonel Lytle to do some secret inquiry work," he vouchsafed to Sheldon. "He told me to

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report to you, or to himself, as was most convenient under the circumstances."

"I understand," murmured Sheldon, little dreaming what was coming.

"I went to his house this afternoon——"

"And he not being at home?" interpolated Sheldon suggestively.

"But he was!"

"Ah! and sent you here?"

"No, he will never direct me again, and that's why I hurried to you, fearing some complication. His landlady had not seen him leave his room since morning, so we peered in. The lamp was burning, although it was broad daylight. We broke in the door. He lay where he had lain since yesterday—across the carpet—dead!"

"Murdered!" gasped Sheldon, white, and sick at heart. "You don't mean to tell me that——"

"Yes, sir. In his heart a dagger—Mexican make. From his window dangled a horse-hair rope—that's how the assassin got in—Mexican make, too."

"Anything missing? — his valuables? — the motive robbery?" chattered the horrified Sheldon.

"No; the motive is hard to guess. The only thing missing, we could notice, was a certain great straw-coloured diamond he wore in his bosom. That had been wrenched violently from its place."

"Don't speak to me! I am sick at heart, shocked, overcome!"

Richard Sheldon waved the man to silence, and bent his ashen face in his trembling hands.

Mexican rope and dagger—the motive—unknown—the yellow diamond missing!

Ah! *he* knew the motive—personal revenge! In a flash, he recalled the story told to him, jarringly, jeeringly, by the bravado-inspired Lytle of the theft of the White God of the fierce, fateful threat of Medeiras.

The vengeance of the Aztec high priest had been swift! He was no idle boaster. The man who had so ruthlessly invaded the sanctuary of his deities, had rifled the blue marble pedestal of the famous idol, and had left a trail of blood along his heedless, reckless course, had paid the penalty of his temerity!

Medeiras had struck the blow—had avenged his insulted deity, had secured the eye of yellow flame, the sun-stone jewel, to blazon anew in the cave of Bureldo.

Was that all? With an uneasy shudder, Richard Sheldon realised that the fanatic would never rest until he had secured the White God as well. Would he trace it to him, and hold him responsible? He dared not put the police on the trail of the assassin. That would bring out all his own infamy in the conniving at a wicked theft; would raise up a scandal that would deter the execution of his plans. No, if Medeiras passed him by scathless, he would not assail Medeiras. He had lost an ally; one by one, his mainstays of security were leaving him. Well, the end was near! A week, at the farthest, and he would fly the country, and all this peril, uncertainty and terror.

He summoned up courage at last to accompany Davenant to Lytle's apartments. As the best friend of the murdered man, he provided for his burial, took charge of his papers, blindfolded the police, while feigning the utmost anxiety to apprehend the murderer, and tried to hurry the tragic episode into obscurity. He knew that the researches of the detective would end in darkness, would terminate in failure complete at the blank wall of "No clue!"

He hastened his plans all he dared. It was now Wednesday. On the Monday following, if nothing happened to defeat his designs, he would leave the country.

Three occurrences changed his plans, however. They came so disastrously, so unexpectedly sudden, that he could barely analyse one event ere another trod closely upon its heels.

On Friday evening he received a letter from his banker. It announced, formally, that the bank refused to make the loan he required. Funds were short, the money market was tight. He must look elsewhere.

The letter turned Richard Sheldon's face white to the lips. It *scared* him. What did it mean? What could it mean, except that some enemy had given the bank a hint of his insolvency? Ah! "That accursed detective, Dean!" This was his work. Was a net forming to ensnare him? He fluttered like a caged bird already. The uncertain, the vague, the unknown, terrified, enthralled him.

Bah! he would not give up the fight. His handbag packed, the £2,000 returned by Dean safe in his pocket, the schemer was ready to fly. Half a loaf was better than none. As he realised, however, that phantoms conjured by his own guilty conscience were alarming him, that the law had no tangible hold upon him, he resolved to wait a day or two longer, at least. Golcondas looked more promising. They might go up a few points. He could borrow a few thousands of friends. He would sell off some of the costly plate and pictures of his house for ready cash. He decided to wait a few days. He timed his flight to catch an Antwerp steamer on Tuesday evening. That was six days ahead. Four forged notes came due then. Yes, he was safe until Tuesday noon.

The second discovery was a report from the special agent, Davenant. He had accidentally found the missing Patrice Ringold.

Next, he had shrewdly, unsuspectedly, shadowed Mr. Detective Dean. He told in detail of the movements of the man-hunter, and, putting this visit of Dean to the bank with that call upon a broker, the merchant gnashed his teeth, as he realised that his former employé was now fighting against his interests.

He pricked up his ears, his lips began to quiver, a "nasty" look came into his wicked eyes as the agent proceeded to state that Dean was given to frequent visits to a man at a retired hotel—to frequent consultations, as well.

"He's a young man, but an odd-looking fellow," explained Davenant. "I think his Malay-like complexion and lashless eyelids and strange appearance are part of a disguise."

"What is his name?" asked Sheldon curiously.

"Warren, on the hotel books. Last night, however, I got into the corridor where his room is. I tilted a transom in an adjoining apartment. I heard them talking. I heard, too, the detective call him by what I suppose is his right name—a slip of the tongue quickly checked, but twice unconsciously repeated."

"And what was the name?" queried Sheldon, little dreaming of the powder-mine his curiosity was to set aflame.

"Burgoyne," came the prompt reply.

Richard Sheldon had been watching the man and listening to his report with his arm leaning on the desk before him, his hand shading his eyes.

At the mention of that name—a name potent to unlock the door of a grave, and set loose a thousand hideous emissaries of augury, doubt and dread—the merchant started so violently that his twitching elbow sent a cut-glass inkstand crashing to the carpet.

He heeded not that the gruesome liquid formed a marring, uncouth rivulet. His eyes staring, he gasped out, hoarsely:

"Say that again!"

"Burgoyne."

"You are sure of this?" came in a swift, tumultuous breath from the plotter's lips.

"Yes, I couldn't mistake it. They talked. I only heard a word here and there, but the Burgoyne fellow is a convict, and——"

"I wish to see that man!"

"Eh!—the detective?" queried the other, in some surprise.

"No—Burgoyne; the man calling himself Burgoyne. Oh,

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impossible!" muttered Richard Sheldon to himself. "It cannot be the same—the convict! *He* is dead—drowned, in his grave these months ago!"

"I can arrange it," announced Davenant.

"Very good."

"So you can not only see him, but watch him, for an hour, a day—all the time, if you like."

"Excellent! It may mean double pay for you if you can."

"You see," continued Davenant, "Dean is like an eel, slippery, active; flitting here and there, all the time. At the hotel where his friend is stopping, however, he is stationary for an hour or two every evening; so I concluded to camp next to them. I engaged room 48. Burgoyne has number 47, next door. Through the transom you can look and listen."

"I understand," interrupted Sheldon peevishly.

"There's the key."

"Thanks. I shall not forget your shrewdness and fidelity. You can find out more about the whereabouts of the girl, Patrice, and report to me to-morrow. I will undertake to watch the Dean end of the case for a day or two."

Two hours later, well muffled up, and wearing a false beard, that very fairly concealed his identity, Richard Sheldon repaired to the hotel where Adrian Burgoyne was staying.

He reached room 48, and let himself in. It was dark and chill, but he moved about with caution, for, through the clouded glass of a transom in a connecting door, he could make out a light in the next apartment.

Stealthily he approached the door, set a chair against it, mounted the chair, peered through the small interstice formed by a slight tilt of the transom, and looked again, his whole sinister soul in his eyes.

At a table, in an attitude of expectancy, sat a man—Adrian Burgoyne. He had taken off his glasses, and his eyes were in a line of direct inspection. A thousand times would Richard Sheldon have passed him on the street, and never would have so much as thought of a resemblance to Adrian Burgoyne, but now, his suspicions tinged with positive certainty, he recognised the inmate of room 47 as the lurker who had stared in at his library window; he traced the same expression of face that convict 407 had worn in his reproachful, accusing eyes, that far day in the long ago, when his influence and the perjured evidence of his allies had sent Adrian Burgoyne to a living tomb—the prison.

"Ah, at last!" suddenly ejaculated the man he was watching, springing to his feet as a quick step sounded in the hall without.

"It is he—Adrian Burgoyne! I know the voice. From the dead!—he is here!" muttered the startled watcher.

The door of the room opened. Bright-faced, buoyant, waving aloft a little square parcel, Mr. Detective Dean stepped into the apartment.

"What success?" projected Burgoyne palpitatingly.

"The best in the world! I've been down to Lynde; I saw Mrs. Loring; I've secured a clue, a precious, a solitary one, and upon *that* hinge all our hopes."

Dean drew the object he bore from its paper covering, and placed it against a book on the table, so that the lamplight irradiated its surface brightly.

Peering curiously, the eager Richard Sheldon saw that it was a photograph, and the innocent, wild-rose face looking up at the rapt Adrian Burgoyne was that of missing Patrice Ringold.

(To be continued.)

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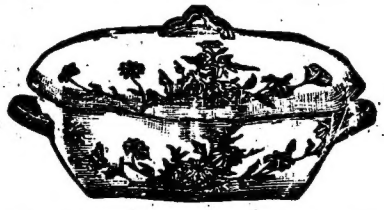

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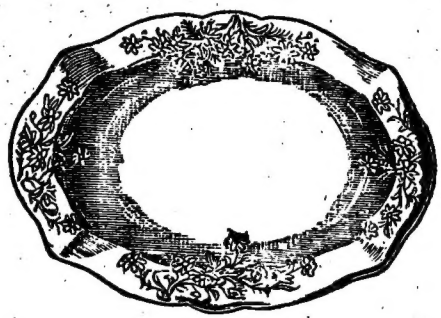

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